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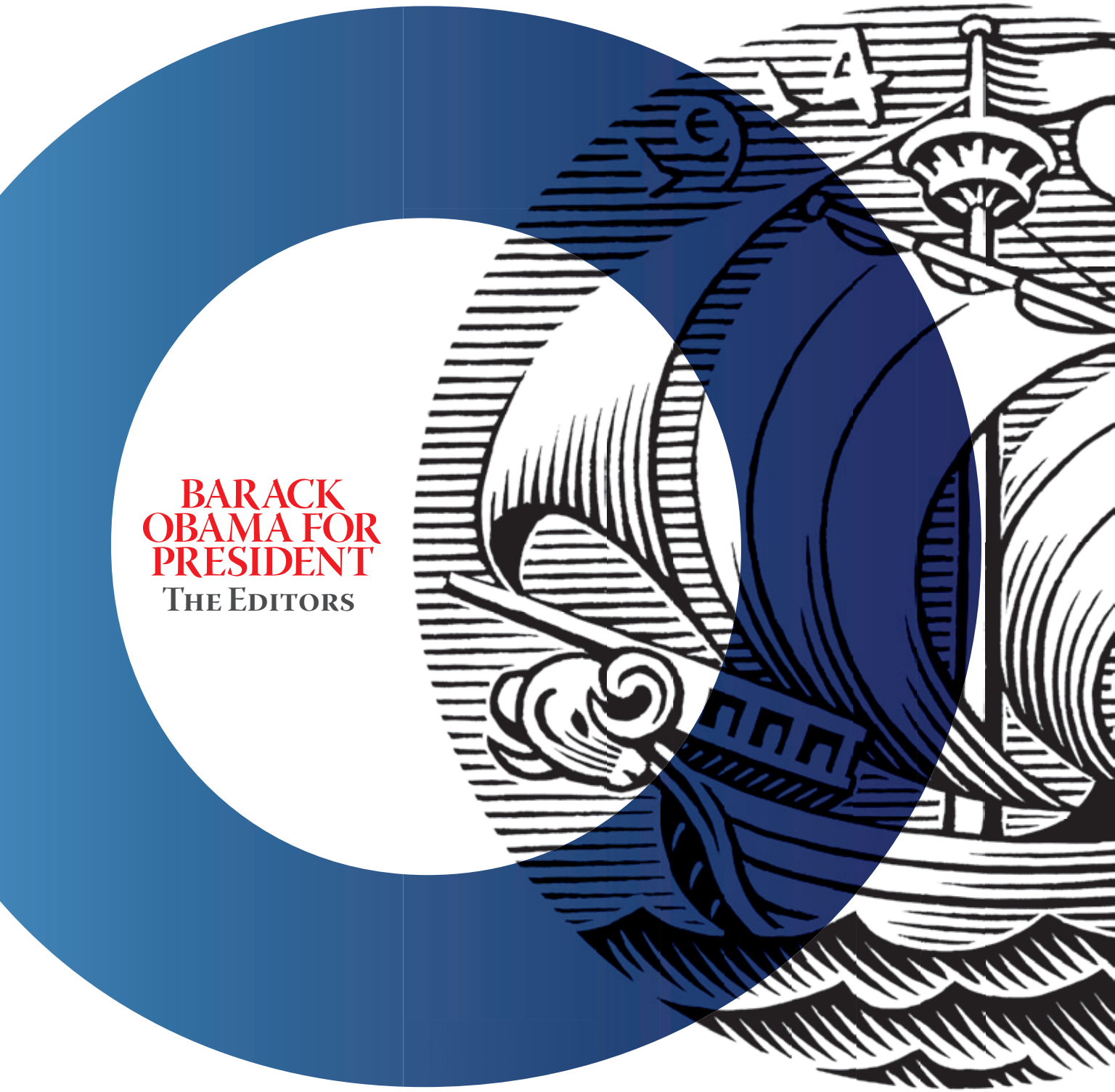
# The New REPUBLIC



## BARACK OBAMA FOR PRESIDENT

THE EDITORS

NOVEMBER 5, 2008 • $4.95

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# REBUILD AFTER METH

*The headlines about methamphetamine—meth—have been grim. This highly addictive drug leaves a path of destruction that hurts families and entire communities. Users suffer severe health consequences; children are often neglected; and communities face dangerous crime and overburdened law enforcement.*

- *Meth use among youth and young adults has declined significantly since 2002.*[1]
- *More meth users are seeking help. Meth treatment admissions have more than tripled in the past decade.*[2]
- *And law enforcement officials are finding fewer and fewer domestic meth labs—meth lab seizures in the U.S. have decreased dramatically since 2004.*[3]

Are we making strides in the fight against meth? Absolutely. From first responders to substance abuse professionals, those who work on the frontlines to combat meth recognize the progress.

There is still work to be done, however—from eradicating meth production and distribution to helping those battling addiction. Consider Teresa. She is a mother, Girl Scout volunteer, and website developer. Her life took a sharp turn when she started using meth to lose weight. Her story went from bad to worse as she abandoned her family, including her 4-year-old daughter, for nearly a year in the search for her next high. She eventually entered a treatment program and made a commitment to conquer her addiction. Today, she is drug-free and a leader in anti-meth efforts in her community. There are thousands of people like Teresa out there, showing individuals and communities what they need to know.

- *Treatment is available, and it works.*
- *Drug addiction treatment is cost-effective—for every $1 invested in drug treatment programs, there is a $12 savings in crime and health care costs.*[4]

Each year, nearly 150,000 people are admitted to treatment for methamphetamine.[5] And outcomes for meth users entering treatment are comparable to those for users of other similar drugs.[6] Find out about substance abuse treatment, and support meth treatment in your community.

Learn more at methresources.gov or call 1-800-662-HELP.

American Society of Addiction Medicine
Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA)
National Association of Addiction Treatment Providers
NAADAC, Association for Addiction Professionals
National Association of Counties
National Association of Social Workers
National Conference of State Legislatures
National Drug Enforcement Officers Association
National Narcotics Officers' Association Coalition
The Partnership for a Drug-Free America
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
State Associations of Addiction Services

[1]SAMHSA, Office of Applied Studies, National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), 2002-2006, Table 8.40B.
[2]SAMHSA, Office of Applied Studies, Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS) 2007, Table 1b.
[3]DOJ, National Drug Intelligence Center, National Methamphetamine Threat Assessment 2008, December 2007.
[4]National Institute on Drug Abuse, "Principles of Drug Addiction Treatment: A Research-Based Guide," 2000.
[5]SAMHSA, Office of Applied Studies, Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS) 2007, Table 1a.
[6]National Institute on Drug Abuse, "Principles of Drug Addiction Treatment: A Research-Based Guide," 2000.

Office of National Drug Control Policy

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

*A Journal of Politics and the Arts*

VOLUME 239 WASHINGTON, NOVEMBER 5, 2008 NUMBER 4,847

# Obama for President

THE PAST EIGHT YEARS have been like watching a TV makeover show in reverse. We entered the Bush era a ravishing beauty attracting envious stares. We leave it a gum-smacking sad sack with split ends and an empty social calendar. Over the course of George W. Bush's second term, in particular, the images of our country have not just been unattractive but virtually apocalyptic: a major city destroyed; cars raining into the Mississippi from a crumbling bridge; swaths of exurbia dotted with foreclosed homes; a financial system in ruins; angry emotionalism flooding politics.

There are many causes of this bleak age, and not all of them can be laid at the feet of the president. But there's no doubt that Bush has run down the one engine capable of making our vast economic and physical infrastructure function properly: the federal government. He has disregarded the tenets that have guided the state since the Progressive Era—deference to disinterested expertise, an apolitical civil service, reliance on regulation to protect the common good. The ethos of the executive branch under his command has been one of "heckuva job" hackery and anti-intellectualism. So the next president will not just inherit an economic crisis, a health care crisis, an environmental crisis, an infrastructural crisis, and, oh yes, two wars, an overstretched military, and a looming Iranian threat. He will inherit a government weakened to the point that it has become ill-equipped to protect the well-being of its citizens.

It's hardly surprising that, as a matter of policy, we overwhelmingly prefer that Barack Obama win the prize of dealing with this mess. But it is his temperament and smarts that give us some hope that he can do more than manage the damage wrought by Bush—that he can actually take advantage of the once-in-a-century opportunity presented by the current crisis and transform the American state.

Any endorsement comes with doubts. We have our share. With a candidate lacking in experience, how can you not? We wish that he had greater fluency in the global economy and the financial system he will likely remake. In foreign policy, Obama's slender record offers few clues. At moments—for instance, during his shaky response to Russia's invasion of Georgia—we ourselves have had jitters.

But we also have hopes that Obama will govern as the person who revealed himself in this campaign. On the whole, he has turned in one of the more impressive performances in recent political history—demonstrating an ability to explain complex ideas in plainspoken English, impeccable managerial skills, evenness of temper, avoidance of sloppy errors, and pragmatism, not to mention that he can really deliver a speech.

If the John McCain of 2001 or 2002 were running, this might be a far closer call. At that time, this magazine considered McCain a truly great political figure. During the 2000 primaries, we endorsed Al Gore and John McCain, an unorthodox step for us. Better than anyone in Washington, McCain made the case against creeping income inequality and political corruption. Oftentimes, we found ourselves wishing that his Democratic counterparts spoke with such clarity. Indeed, a cover story we ran urged him to switch parties. We didn't expect that he would listen, but we didn't expect that he would transform himself into a Sean Hannity conservative, either. And we certainly failed to appreciate how his impulsiveness could lead him to such spectacularly bad decisions (Sarah Palin) and such a spectacularly incoherent campaign. The implosion of the old McCain, if he ever truly existed as we imagined, saddens us, not least because the candidate he's become is so poorly suited to the challenges of the moment.

Obama, by contrast, has the makings of a man who understands the times. In these pages, our colleague Cass R. Sunstein has described his governing style as "visionary minimalism." By this, he means Obama will work to achieve an ambitious agenda but will revise his opinion when the evidence dictates a different course. He is a sincere liberal but without the temperament of an ideologue. His health care and environmental plans are broadly progressive but make concessions to the free market and do not fit the platonic ideals of the left. He doesn't intend to create a single-payer system (alas) and expresses openness to nuclear power. His recent education rhetoric has incorporated the best of the reform movement.

You can already grasp the political benefits of this style. It's striking how many conservatives have complimented Obama, even those who oppose him. No less than Charles Krauthammer has declared that he possesses a "first-class intellect and a first-class temperament." His appeal to the right has everything to do with his detached style. Obama has even been described as a Burkean. Unlike Bush, he actually listens to those with whom he vehemently disagrees; and, in the course of debating John McCain, he frequently, and without hesitation, voiced agreement.

Now, braininess and a knack for riffing on Reinhold Niebuhr hardly guarantees a successful presidency. But this is a distinct moment with an economy that won't likely be healed by the simple application of off-the-shelf ideological prescriptions or a diminished government blanched of experts. In the middle of this recession, the national mood will run raw. Major policy changes, now inevitable, will exacerbate the anger.

Fortunately, Obama has a fetish for data and the company of social scientists, as Noam Scheiber has shown in his reporting. And, just as important, he has the soothing demeanor that might calm tempers and the gift for language that could make necessary, but not necessarily popular, policies more palatable. His election offers an opportunity to roll back the Bush legacy and perhaps—if he turns out to be the rare transformational president that occurs when man and moment meld—even restore us to our former beauty. ◆



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# The Nixon-Obama Debates

*Senator, you're no Jack Kennedy. Oh wait—actually, you are.*

JONATHAN CHAIT

In 1960, John F. Kennedy attacked the incumbent Republican administration for allowing the Soviet Union to open up a "missile gap" over the United States. The gap turned out not to exist. But it put the young, inexperienced Massachusetts senator on the political offensive and positioned him to the right of his more experienced Republican foe on the central foreign policy question of the day.

Barack Obama has pulled off the same feat in this election, with an unintentional assist from John McCain. Since September 11, 2001, the threat of Al Qaeda and Islamic radicalism has dominated the foreign policy debate, and, on this question, Republicans have dominated Democrats, just as they did through much of the cold war. Obama may be winning primarily due to the economy and the unpopularity of President Bush, but the more surprising and historically significant thing about this election is that he has managed to stake out the more hawkish ground on fighting Al Qaeda.

How did the GOP lose its most potent and unassailable political asset? It goes back to July 2007, when *The New York Times* reported that, in 2005, the Bush administration had aborted a mission to capture senior Al Qaeda members in Pakistan, to the frustration of many intelligence officials and members of the Special Operations Forces. A month later, Obama gave a foreign policy speech in which he lambasted the administration for a "terrible mistake to fail to act." Obama warned, "If we have actionable intelligence about high-value terrorist targets and President Musharraf won't act, we will."

Obama's threat received little attention until he had established himself as the all-but-inevitable Democratic nominee. McCain, seeking to define his opponent as a foreign policy naïf, began warning that America could not "risk the confused leadership of an inexperienced candidate who once suggested bombing our ally, Pakistan." In reality, Obama had advocated not bombs but special forces operations. McCain saw it is an opportunity to cast Obama as a total ignoramus—the fool doesn't even know Pakistan is one of the good guys!

The issue would barely have made a ripple in the campaign had not one audience member at the second presidential debate asked the candidates if they would violate Pakistani sovereignty to pursue Al Qaeda. Obama replied, "If we have Osama bin Laden in our sights and the Pakistani government is unable or unwilling to take them out, then I think that we have to act, and we will take them out. We will kill bin Laden, we will crush Al Qaeda. That has to be our biggest national security priority."

McCain could have agreed with Obama. But he seemed determined to play the part of the foreign policy graybeard correcting the arrogant young upstart. So McCain, while noting parenthetically that he, too, would use troops "where necessary," insisted that the key thing was to work with Pakistan. McCain fairly sneered, "He said he wants to announce that he's going to attack Pakistan. Remarkable."

While there's no precise way to measure how this specific exchange went over with the public, some things are clear. Opinion polls showed that debate viewers deemed Obama the winner. Thirty-four percent told a *USA Today*/Gallup poll that the debate made them view Obama more favorably, while only 12 percent said they viewed him less favorably. The reaction to McCain was diametrical: Twelve percent saw him more favorably, 33 percent less favorably. What's more, a ABC News/*Washington Post* poll following the debate found that McCain's advantage on handling terrorism, once 20 points, had dwindled to six.

Not long ago, it was simply assumed that terrorism would be a massive political advantage for Republican presidential candidates for the foreseeable future. That any Republican, especially an experienced war hero, would find himself outflanked on this question by a Democrat—let alone an inexperienced Democrat with a Muslim-sounding name—would have defied imagination.

Like the missile gap controversy, the Pakistan dispute is largely a political show. (McCain has admitted he'd use force to capture Al Qaeda agents in Pakistan, rendering his complaints against Obama farcical.) But it does stand for a genuine schism between the two parties and their ideological tendencies. Conservatives are fixated on the role of states. "Terrorists cannot operate without the succor and protection of governments," wrote Charles Krauthammer not long after September 11, 2001. "The planet is divided into countries. Unless terrorists want to camp in Antarctica, they must live in sovereign states." President Bush declared that, henceforth, all nations would be deemed with us or against us, and those in the latter camp would be invaded.

This line of thinking led directly to the invasion of Iraq. And, during most of the Bush years, conservatives viewed their greater willingness to fight conventional wars in the name of fighting radical Islam as a sign of their seriousness about the threat. Radical Islamic terrorism was an existential threat, not merely a criminal nuisance. The fundamental divide between right and left, as they saw it, was that only their side understood that this was a War.

But, over the last couple of years, less and less of this bluster has emanated from the right. Al Qaeda has fled to a semi-autonomous region that defies easy with-us-or-against-us categorization. Conservatives have reverted to their default fixation with states. McCain called Russia's invasion of Georgia "the first probably serious crisis internationally since the end of the cold war." What about September 11, Islamofascism—you know, the transcendent cause of our time? McCain and conservatives still care about that. But their focus has already turned to Russia, Iran, China, and other nasty governments across the globe.

You can care about both radical Islam and the traditional great power struggle, and both McCain and Obama do. But you can only have one first priority. Obama (rightly, I think) considers the prospect of terrorists acquiring a nuclear weapon the highest potential threat. Thus he places more emphasis on securing Russia's cooperation in locking down fissile material and pressuring Iran to stop its nuclear program, while McCain gives more priority to confronting and isolating Russia.

Fortunately for Obama, Americans still consider Osama bin Laden enemy number one. If McCain wanted to run against Russia, he should have run for president 48 years ago. ◆

## TRB
### *From Washington*



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# What Does it Mean to Put Country First?

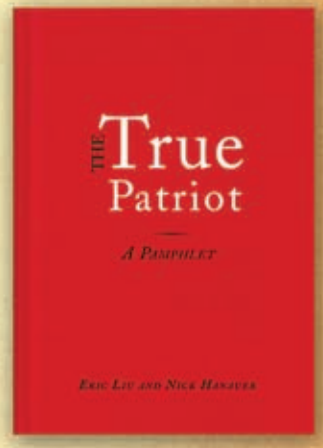
SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN has a lot to say about putting country first. It's a fine slogan. It reminds Americans that nearly half a century ago, McCain endured captivity with courage and honor. But now we're well into the twenty-first century and the country faces untold and unprecedented challenges. If you are a candidate for President, "country first" has to be more than a personal pet phrase; it has to be a moral framework for the policies of your own party and for the way you intend to lead and govern. And so we must ask:

*IS IT TRULY PUTTING COUNTRY FIRST* to tilt our tax policies so that the wealthiest pay less and the rest of us pay more?

*IS IT TRULY PUTTING COUNTRY FIRST* to champion the kind of deregulation that lets private greed call itself public interest and then ends up costing us all?

*IS IT TRULY PUTTING COUNTRY FIRST* to delay investing in alternative energy sources in favor of the immediate gratification of "Drill Baby Drill"?

*IS IT TRULY PUTTING COUNTRY FIRST* to select a running mate just to appease the party faithful when she is manifestly unready to lead the country?




A pamphlet by
Eric Liu & Nick Hanauer
Available at
bookstores everywhere

The time has come for some straight talk about patriotism. It is not enough to *profess* love of country and then espouse policies that undermine the country's values, power and promise. True patriotism is not about how loudly one can declare national pride; it's about *earning* that pride anew each day—by making tough choices and setting priorities that value the long term over the short term, contribution over consumption, a fair shot for all over a sweet deal for some, and statesmanship over stunts and sideshows. True patriotism, in short, means living by a framework of principles that actually put country first. We challenge every American—especially our leaders—to do just that.

READ *THE TRUE PATRIOT*. JOIN THE CONVERSATION AT TRUEPAT.ORG.

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## Epic Fail

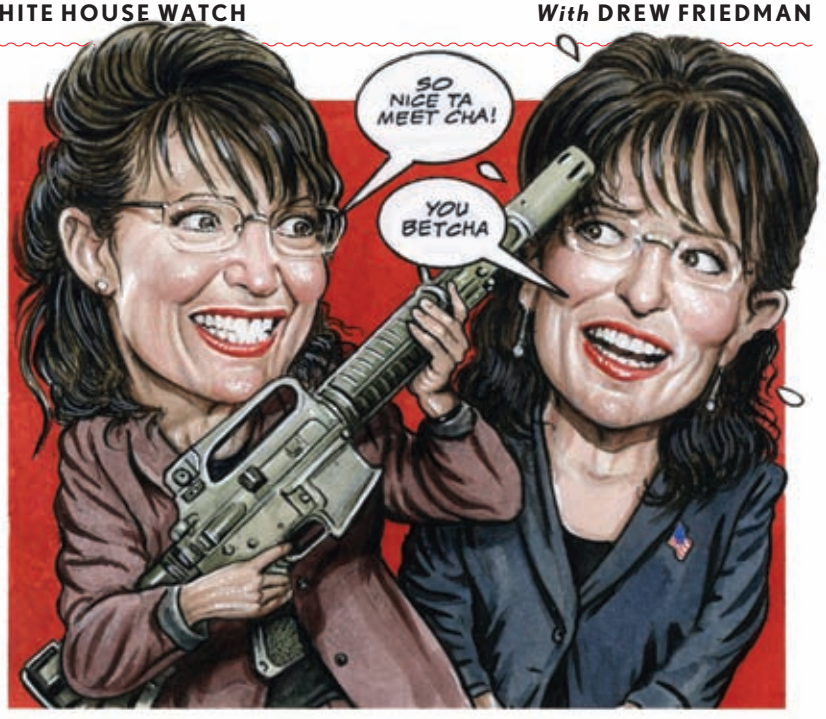
*The great flummoxing recession of '08.*

As investors all around the world ran scared this past month, their panic was about the only thing easy to understand. The global financial system was collapsing and almost nobody could say—in plain English—what exactly was fueling such a gigantic crisis. Not the president, who offered insipid generalities; nor the presidential candidates, who stuck to old themes like earmarks, taxes, and deregulation. Not even Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson, who delivered abstract lessons about liquidity and interest-rate spreads but whose plan for the government to buy "toxic assets"—loans that have little or no market value because of their lack of transparency—misfired and had to be recast as a plan to buy stakes in banks. This has been the Great Incomprehensible Recession of 2008. Incomprehensibility was at the root of the problem, and it is at the root of our difficulty getting out of it.

As the United States struggles to get past the turmoil, the challenge will be to understand its most basic causes. Did the trouble start with the Reagan agenda of deregulation? The Bush era's passive Securities and Exchange Commission and Alan Greenspan's Federal Reserve, with their loose rules governing off-the-books investments and the ratio of capital to lending by financial institutions? The flood of capital into the United States from China and the Persian Gulf? The Federal Reserve's easy money and the failure to regulate complex new derivatives? Or was it the liberal political pressure on Congress and the administration to keep interest rates low and expand homeownership recklessly through Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac? The truth probably includes some role for all these explanations. But the truth has also been radically unclear because of the difficulty in understanding the machinations and statements of the financial wizards handling our money.

Throughout its recent heyday, Wall Street sounded so smart. They developed computer models and complicated packages of assets that seemed to make the risky debt piled on homeowners and consumers look like safe debt. The sheer complexity of these assets masked the weakness in the system. The jargon employed to describe off-the-books "structured investment vehicles," "collateralized debt obligations," and computerized financial models—not to mention the exotic derivatives like "credit default swaps"—was a barrier to understanding how they worked. As Representative Barney Frank says, it has not been easy for even the most sophisticated investment banker to explain the workings of credit default, currency, or interest-rate swaps. Swaps—essentially contracts between two or more parties aimed at hedging against the loss on an underlying asset—are the instruments that Warren Buffett famously once described as "financial weapons of mass destruction." The danger is aggravated by the difficulty in measuring what threat they posed for the institutions—commercial banks, investment banks, mutual funds, pensions, hedge funds, insurance companies—possessing them. There are now more than $500 trillion of such swaps and options notionally coursing through the global financial system, and, while we know that doesn't translate into $500 trillion in risk, no one is sure in the current environment what the actual risk is. Not since the height of the cold war has the fate of the world rested so profoundly in the hands of a priest-

**WHITE HOUSE WATCH** *With* **DREW FRIEDMAN**




*Tina Fey encounters the special guest host in the SNL green room.*



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hood of experts with a monopoly of understanding obscure concepts, if they understand them at all. The expertise of the cold warriors was in throw weights, MIRVs, and the concept of "mutual assured destruction," which was supposed to make us secure. It is not a terribly comforting analogy.

By themselves, swaps have not been a major factor in the current crisis, at least so far. In Europe, there has been a cry for years to regulate hedge funds, which specialize in using swaps and other exotic investments to make bets invisible to normal markets and regulators. Now, to the embarrassment of European and American regulators alike, the latest financial turmoil has engulfed not the hedge funds and other private equity institutions that count on these instruments, but the most regulated part of the system, particularly the major commercial banks. All the explicit government supervision in the world failed to prevent them from investing in packages of subprime mortgages, which seemed like a sure thing as long as home prices rose ever higher. You could not go wrong even if a mortgage defaulted, the logic went, since the underlying home value seemed destined to rise in perpetuity.

But the values did go down, starting in 2006. Now we do not know how much further the values will plunge, and the extent of the hole these now-"toxic" assets—in the form of mortgages, mortgage-backed securities, and other forms of debt—leave in the books of large and small financial institutions in the United States and Europe. Earlier this month, the toxicologists at the International Monetary Fund, declaring that the United States remained the "epicenter" of the global credit meltdown, estimated that losses on U.S. loans and securitized assets would likely increase to $1.4 trillion. (In a sliding economy, such sums are the ultimate moving target.) There are no certain figures about the holdings of such assets in European banks, but the number is clearly large and subject to panic there, as well. Without knowing who holds what, and what the assets are really worth, it will be difficult to know if a solution is at hand.

Like wars, financial crises always unfold in unexpected ways. Problems that are poorly understood require solutions subject to revision and reconsideration. That's why each new step taken by the Federal Reserve or the Treasury intended to stave off the horrors of collapse had such a short shelf life. At first, Paulson was praised for letting the house of Lehman go under; thank goodness the Treasury was not going to bail out everyone, people said. Moral hazard—the concern that, if you do not pay for your mistakes, you will repeat them—was countered. Now the conventional wisdom is that Lehman's wipeout accelerated the global panic. We are not hearing too much these days about moral hazard. A few weeks ago, the Treasury opposed direct federal investments in banks and financial institutions. When the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008 was signed into law, Paulson said it would be wrongheaded to use the $700 billion appropriated by Congress for such an intrusive enterprise. Now Paulson has flip-flopped, and at least $250 billion is to be spent on investments that can be seen as a kind of partial nationalization of the banking system.

There is a final irony about the issue of how much we know and how much it is healthy for us to know. Are there instances, in moments when markets are panicking, when it is better to reassure the public than to strip the system of its mysteries and let people see how precarious it is? If we could know how many of the assets of major banks are toxic, would we want to know? Would knowing everything about the threats to the system hasten a solution or realize the threats?

Under the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP), for example, Paulson is still supposed to purchase some of the toxic assets with his remaining $450 billion from the banks and resell them when they regain value. But there remains a problem of deciding their price, which Treasury has been given tremendous latitude to determine. Beyond that problem, economists and regulators disagree over whether it is healthier for banks and other institutions to value their "troubled" assets at their current distressed market value (known as "mark to market") or at the value based on the revenue they are projected to generate over their lifetime. Sometimes, it must be said, discretion is the better part of leadership. When Paulson said at the outset that Treasury was going to buy troubled assets from banks but not make direct purchases of bank shares, he may have thought at the time that the second step would be unnecessary. Or he may have thought that signaling his backup plan guaranteed that the original plan would fail.

Economic crises are never so easy to decipher when you are still in the midst of them. Even afterward, it can be difficult. We're still debating the causes of the Great Depression and which parts of the New Deal worked. The first priority for long-term reform must be to make the entire global financial system more transparent, comprehensible, and accountable without imposing too many new restrictions. We need stricter oversight by the Treasury and the Federal Reserve, both of which have been lax for years, and more public understanding of what that oversight is and is not doing. A nation or collection of nations that does not nurture a healthy regulatory system runs the risk that the people in charge lack a fundamental understanding of the system's weaknesses and have little incentive to look for clues to possible failures when times are good. While the best system might not have been enough to forestall catastrophe, it might have prevented us entering this crisis feeling so helpless.

*Steven R. Weisman*

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*Steven R. Weisman is editorial director and public policy fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics.*

## Unsafe At Any District

*Wingnut blowback in reddest America.*

In many ways, it was your standard Democratic fund-raiser in a Republican stronghold. On a recent Friday, a largely bleeding-heart contingent from Maryland's first congressional district—professors from the nearby liberal arts college, a left-wing lobbyist, a Sears scion turned Obama donor, the president of an environmental foundation—holed up in a Patton Boggs lawyer's Eastern Shore home to give their earnest young congressional candidate, state prosecutor Frank Kratovil, a sympathetic pat on the back. But somebody there was not like most of the others. When Kratovil's introducer stepped forward to give the toast, it was someone the crowd would recognize from other, perhaps less friendly contexts: the district's outgoing *Republican* congressman, Wayne Gilchrest. And Gilchrest didn't hold back in praising the Democrat vying to replace him. "When I fought in Vietnam, I wanted to be with people who had the same values I had, whom I could trust," Gilchrest said, according to one attendee, as guests looked up from their mini-crabcakes. "If I was again in the trenches in Vietnam, Frank is who I'd want next to me." By the end of Gilchrest's speech, Kratovil's eyes were welling with grateful tears.

Republicans in this part of Maryland are not supposed to make Democrats weep tears of joy. Culturally more Bible Belt than Beltway, the gun-loving first district—a red ghetto on the Eastern Shore tucked between the Chesapeake



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Bay and Delaware—favored George W. Bush by 26 points in 2004. "Obama will get crushed here," Kratovil told me with a matter-of-fact shrug.

Even though Kratovil is a law-and-order moderate—he already hangs out with the conservative Democratic faction in the House, the Blue Dogs—eastern Maryland is conservative enough that, normally, he should be getting crushed, too. Only there's another problem here for the GOP. While Democrats have bent over backwards to recruit red-district candidates who will go over well with the camo-and-pickup-truck set, Republicans are becoming more purist—so much so that, here in eastern Maryland, they've driven their own incumbent congressman to the Democratic dark side. Just when you thought Republicans nationwide had hit electoral rock bottom, they seem determined to make things worse. Among other mistakes, they might just have foisted *too* red a candidate on this reddest of regions.

THE TROUBLE in Maryland's crimson paradise began in February, when unhappy GOPers deposed Gilchrest, their party's incumbent, in the primary. Jacobin conservatives had always been irritated by the pro-gay-rights, pro-environment maverick, but Gilchrest's treasons—he was one of two Republicans in the House to vote for Nancy Pelosi's war funding bill—pricked even more after the GOP loss in 2006. This time around, conservatives found the perfect Gilchrest foil in state senator Andy Harris, a happy ideologue known for casting lone anti-spending votes on bipartisan bills and bragging that the only newspaper his family read growing up was *Human Events*.

The Club for Growth dumped nearly $250,000 into Harris's primary effort, while James Dobson, the Eagle Forum, and *The Washington Times* proffered endorsements. Harris appeared on television deriding Gilchrest as "too liberal … a big tax-and-spender"—and won the bitter five-way primary. Gleeful Republicans all but preordered his congressional lapel pin. "The numbers speak for themselves," one National Republican Congressional Committee spokesman told *The Baltimore Sun*. "This is a Republican stronghold that will perform well."

But, by March 11, the stronghold was under siege. That was the morning Gilchrest's chief of staff and office manager, as well as one of his fund-raisers, showed up to a "Republicans for Kratovil" breakfast, sending titters through the local press. Things grew worse in the late summer, when Gilchrest himself began

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to stump for the Democrat—effusively. "Not only are we aligned on the issues, it's almost like [Kratovil] is my son," he rhapsodized to me recently. "He loves the land. He loves the Eastern Shore … its vast open spaces, its fishing villages, the call of the geese in the fall, the sound of cows mooing, the sound of eagles chirping in the spring after the eaglets hatch."

Harris's campaign manager dismissed Team Gilchrest's snub as bitterness. "I'd call it bipolar support, not bipartisan," he sniffed. But it turned out Gilchrest wasn't the only moderate, esoteric Republican in the first district. Gilchrest's fund-raiser, Lynn Caligiuri, recalls a garden party she threw for Kratovil in late September, which a number of her Republican friends attended. At the party, Kratovil regaled the crowd with stories of Harris's lone "no" votes. "I can't tell you how many Republicans came up to me and said, 'I had no idea how conservative he was,'" says Caligiuri. She pauses and giggles at the memory. "One of them was my Dad."

What about eastern Maryland's right-wingers? Well, wingnuts are *not* all alike, and even the district's conservatives—many of whom combine pro-gun, anti-tax sentiments with tender concern for protecting the Chesapeake Bay—found reason to worry. Frank Frohn, a self-described "very conservative" "hunter and shooter" from Stevensville, had never donated to a Democrat before Kratovil. But, he complained, "if you look at Andy Harris's environmental record, his vote is always no. How can you move the country forward by continually saying no? We could send a bobble-head doll to Congress to say no."

Kratovil out-raised Harris in the third quarter, and his campaign's latest internal poll puts him—amazingly—just ahead. But Harris is unrepentant. An anti-Kratovil ad he recently put on the air features lines similar to those from his anti-Gilchrest primary spot—"too liberal … a big spender"—and some of the same man-on-the-street people speaking them.

Wayne Gilchrest's revenge lends special drama to the Kratovil-Harris battle. But the House race map is awash in Kratovils and Harrises. No district is too red for Democrats to play in—not Maryland's first district; not Texas's seventh, whose incumbent Republican favors creating state militias to confront illegal immigrants; not GOP districts in Alabama, California, Ohio, and Wyoming that Bush won with more than 60 percent of the vote in '04 and that now all boast legitimate Democratic challengers; not districts in Indiana, Pennsylvania, and Texas that went for Bush by 20 points or more and were won in '06 by conservative Democrats. The GOP has often responded to these challenges by tacking even further to the right. Purist candidates who rail against abortion in districts like Indiana's eighth and North Carolina's eleventh seem likely to help Democrats consolidate their '06 wins. Amazingly, Democrats now occupy over 60 districts that voted for Bush in '04, often by fronting candidates who barely have a thing in common with Nancy Pelosi. By contrast, as more and more of its moderates retire or get ousted, the GOP is clinging to just eight districts that voted for John Kerry. Democrats have even or better odds of winning half of them in November.

The Democrats' adaptability spells victory—for now. But Pelosi's big, fat, motley family could get dysfunctional in the 111th Congress.

Two days after the Kratovil fund-raiser with Gilchrest, Kratovil joined Donna Edwards—a liberal African American representative from the adjoining district—for a service in a Salisbury, Maryland black church. Over brunch in the church's social hall, the two young Democrats communed about the government's failure to monitor Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. "See, you and me, we're in line," Kratovil gushed, over a forkful of baked chicken.

But, when Kratovil wandered off to try and shoot some hoops with the pastor, the mood darkened. Do you worry, I asked Edwards, that as the Democratic Party tries to gain the whole country it could forfeit its soul? She does, she admitted. She recalled the day in September when she found herself on the House floor, arguing against a bill that would force the District of Columbia to loosen its gun laws—written by Travis Childers, a freshman Blue Dog from Mississippi. "I was like, my opponent is a *Democrat*?" Edwards said.

The Childers bill passed the House (though it has stalled in the Senate). But Blue Dog Democrats may face more vigorous left-wing opposition in 2009. The House leadership favored conservatives in the 110th, and progressives often capitulated for the good of the party. But, explains Edwards, that forgiving spirit won't last forever. If Kratovil wins in November—a Democratic miracle—it could soon be tears of frustration he's weeping. "We're done laying down everything for the Blue Dogs," Edwards warned. "I talk to progressives and we say, 'We're done giving in.'"

*Eve Fairbanks*

## Defending Sarah

*Chris Shays, barracuda chum.*

It's a beautiful Saturday afternoon in October, and, as Republican Representative Chris Shays drives between churches in his affluent Connecticut district, he is talking about the possibility of being knifed. "Rahm Emanuel—if I got a knife, it would be in my belly," he says, referring to the combative head of the Democratic Caucus. "With Nancy," he continues, alluding to the House speaker, "it would be in my back." He then goes on to tell a story about an encounter that took place two years ago at the House gym. At the time, Emanuel was head of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC), which was targeting Shays—a Rockefeller Republican who represents a Democratic district—for defeat. In the gym's locker room, Shays approached Emanuel and said he was "really disappointed" that, with so many races to choose from, the DCCC had chosen to target him. Emanuel, Shays recalls, "put his hands on both shoulders, looked at me square in the eyes, and said, 'Look, with all due respect, from one friend to another, we're going to spend a fucking three million dollars to defeat you.' That was his words. Verbatim."

Shays—a trim 63-year-old who's driving himself and wearing a light-green sweater plus a Peace Corps alumni baseball cap—describes the encounter as friendly and says both men laughed as they traded barbs. But the fact that he is still dwelling on the incident two years later suggests that maybe, just maybe, both Emanuel and the DCCC have gotten inside his head. If so, it would be easy to understand why. Thanks to the 2006 Democratic wave that Emanuel helped engineer, Shays is now the only Republican House member in New England. And, having barely held onto his seat in Connecticut's fourth district in 2004 and 2006, he is once again embroiled in a close race, this time against Democrat Jim Himes, a former Goldman Sachs investment banker from Greenwich. (Connecticut's fourth may be the only district in the country where it is still acceptable for a politician to have Goldman Sachs on his resumé.) The latest poll from SurveyUSA shows Himes leading by three points. Meanwhile, *The Cook Report* has described the race as



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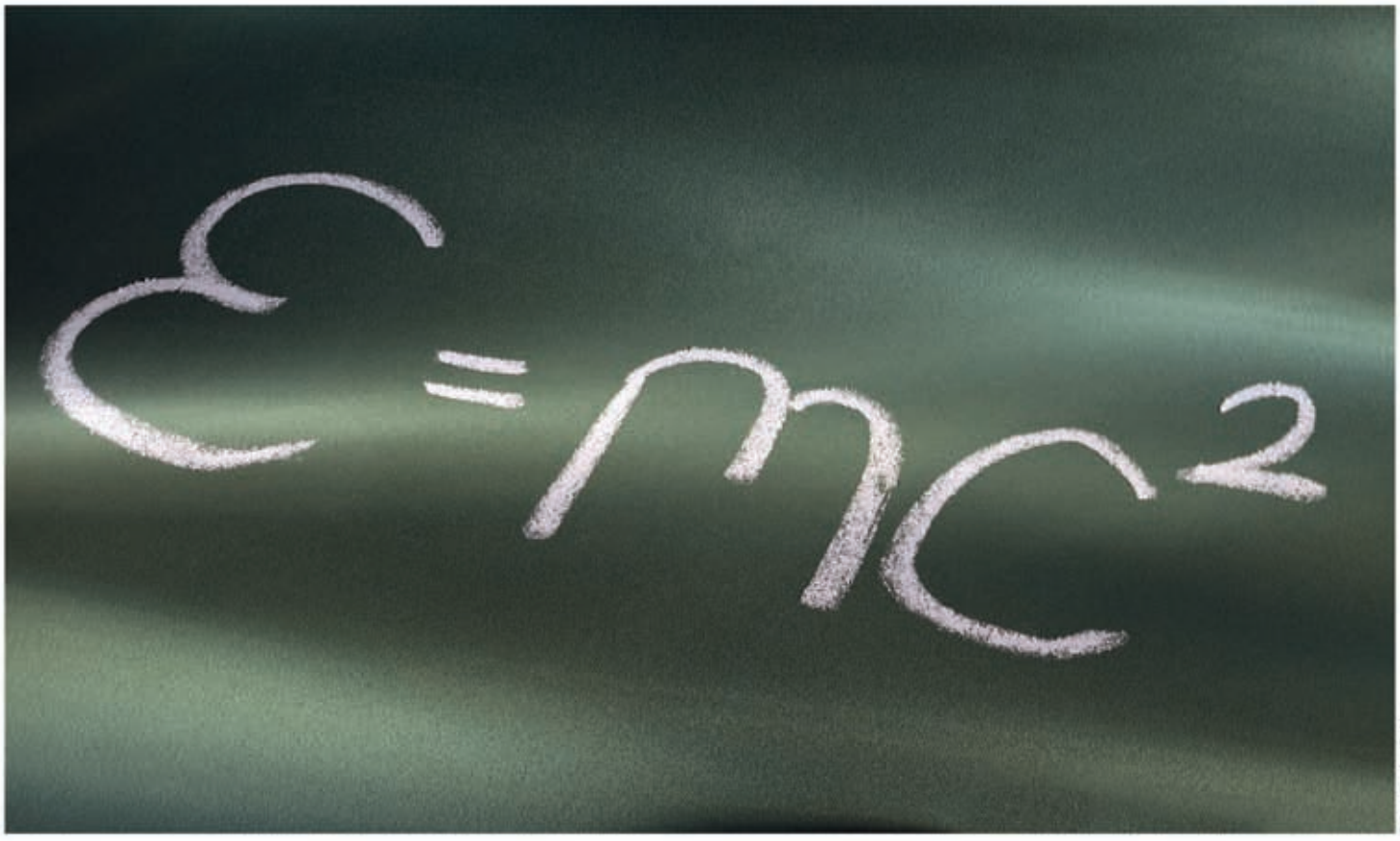


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"a toss-up," and both campaigns say it is likely to be a squeaker.

More than anything else, what has protected Shays all these years is his image as a maverick. Sure, he may be a Republican, but on issue after issue—abortion, gay rights, gun control, the environment—he has repeatedly proven willing to buck his own party. He was the first GOP representative to call for Tom DeLay to step down when the majority leader was accused of ethics violations. And, in 2006, he suspended his campaign for three days after the National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC) sent out a flier declaring that his opponent, Dianne Farrell, wanted to have "coffee talk with the Taliban" (a footnote indicated that it was actually the leader of an organization that endorsed Farrell who had suggested that the United States sit down with the Afghan Islamists). "After the election," Shays says, "I took a bundle of [ads] down to Washington and said, 'I want to see the *idiot* who thought this was helping me.'"

This year, Shays boasts that he hasn't allowed the NRCC to run any commercials for his campaign. He's also refused to so much as mention Himes in his ads, staying true to his long-standing distaste for negative campaigning of any kind. And he never hesitates to proclaim his credentials as an iconoclast. "I'm one of the few politicians that isn't captured by the extremes of either party," he told me.

Clearly, his maverick spirit remains as strong as ever. And yet that, in an odd reversal from past election cycles, may now be part of Chris Shays's problem.

In recent years, Shays has kept his distance from presidential races. Not this time around. McCain and Shays have been allies for a long time, most famously on their pet issue of campaign finance reform. The two men don't just share the same causes, though; they also share a temperamental affinity—a certain pride in their mutual penchant for disloyalty to the political party they call home. In short, they have a lot in common. It's no surprise, then, that Shays is serving as co-chair of McCain's campaign committee in Connecticut, has stumped for the Republican candidate in New Hampshire, and, during the Republican convention, described Obama as having "no record, none, zero, zip." In the last few weeks, even as a number of local GOP candidates across the country have sought to distance themselves from their party's floundering nominee, Shays's enthusiasm for McCain—whom he endorsed all the way back in February 2007—has not waned. He recently told *National Journal* that, when it came to Congress, he thought a President McCain would "shake things up in a very constructive way."

Moderate voters might have forgiven Shays if he had confined himself to cheering McCain or even to criticizing Obama. But Shays has gone a step further, coming out swinging in defense of the most polarizing figure in national politics: Sarah Palin. Despite originally planning to stay home from the Republican convention to focus on his own race (and perhaps to avoid the taint of his party), Shays flew out to Minneapolis at the last minute to support Palin, whom he believed was being unfairly assailed

by the press. "I saw all these attacks—they didn't say the same things to Barack Obama. They didn't question his record. They didn't talk about what he's done," Shays told MSNBC. When asked how Palin's anti-choice stance might play among the women in his district, Shays (who is himself pro-choice) responded, "You know, not all women are pro-choice. . . . It's a woman that should be selected, not a particular kind of woman."

How could a liberal Republican who faults the religious right for "weeding out centrists" express so much enthusiasm for a vice-presidential pick made largely to appease religious conservatives? How could someone who seems to compulsively disdain partisanship of all kinds become so enamored with Palin, given her ultra-partisan attacking style? What, exactly, is Shays thinking?

I asked Shays how he could reconcile his support of Palin with his worldview. "If people want to say she has views about government that I disagree with—what she has and what I like about her is what I like about John McCain," he responded, adding, "I really believe she is one gutsy person that is willing to shake things up in her state in a way that few men have." In other words, Shays supports Palin because he sees her as a fellow maverick.

But that stance could cost him in a district where Obama currently leads by ten points. At a town fair in working-class Shelton, I met Linda Robak, a 54-year-old who had long counted herself a Shays fan but is now working for the Himes campaign. "It all changed when he endorsed Sarah Palin and called her a qualified candidate for v.p.," Robak told me. "Three weeks ago, I sent him a letter. I always respected him, but he threw away his credibility." Democrats, meanwhile, have been doing their best to make hay of Shays's unexpected proximity to his party's presidential ticket. One DCCC commercial links him directly to McCain—citing remarks in which he echoes McCain's line that "the fundamentals of our economy are strong"—and Connecticut Representative Rosa DeLauro has denounced Shays's defense of Palin as "demeaning to women." When I asked Himes about his opponent's support for the Alaska governor, he didn't hesitate to pile on, citing a comment that Shays made in a television interview: "He claims to support reproductive rights; she opposes abortion. Then he calls her 'awesome.' How could he?"

And so it is that the one thing which has long protected Shays—his maverick sensibility—could now help end his political career. In that sense, he is very much like McCain himself. The Arizona senator, after all, has been well served by his maverick instincts for much of his political life. But, at the most important moment of his career, those instincts led him in disastrous directions—causing him to gamble with his vice-presidential pick, provoking him to suspend his campaign in the midst of the financial crisis, and generally making him appear erratic and unpresidential.

Of course, Shays has survived for a long time under precarious conditions, and perhaps—despite the considerable risk he took in lining up so closely behind fellow mavericks McCain and Palin—he will hold on for yet another victory. And if not? It won't necessarily have been Rahm Emanuel or Nancy Pelosi who did him in. Arguably, Chris Shays will have knifed himself.

*Suzy Khimm*

AP PHOTO/DOUGLAS HEALEY



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# The Promised Land of Milk and Honey

## Could it have been? Could the dream still come true?

In 1947, the British, who had the Mandate over Palestine, decided that they had enough of the decades of fighting and slaughter between Arabs and Jews. They washed their hands of the Mandate and turned it over to the United Nations.

### What are the facts?

**A solution not accepted.** Wishing to end the bloodshed and to create a stable and, hopefully, permanent solution to the decades of conflict, the U.N. decreed a partition of the country west of the Jordan River into an Arab and a Jewish state. In deference to Arab Muslim insistence that it was their "third holiest city," the city of Jerusalem, the focus of all Jewish aspirations for two millennia, was to be "internationalized." For the Jews this was bitterly disappointing. Still, in order to create their dreamed-of state, to normalize the lives of the Jewish inhabitants, and to make possible the ingathering of the Holocaust survivors, they accepted the partition plan. They declared their state, *Eretz Yisrael* – the Land of Israel – and became a nation. Forever to his credit, US President Harry Truman recognized the nascent state of Israel within minutes of its declaration of independence.

The Arabs rejected the partition proposal out of hand. Instead, six Arab armies invaded the country from all sides. They vowed to wage a war of extermination. The Jewish population of only 650,000 people was lightly armed and almost hopelessly outnumbered. But in an almost Biblical miracle, the ragtag Jewish forces defeated the combined Arab might. They suffered horrendous casualties – about 1 per cent of the population. It was as if the United States were to lose 3 million people in a conflict. The Arabs also suffered greatly. Goaded mostly by their leaders to make room for the invading armies, about 650,000 fled the fighting. They were not accepted by their Arab brethren. They were interned and live to this day in so-called refugee camps, slum cities, in which they lead miserable and totally unproductive lives, dependent on the dole of the world. They are consumed with hatred against the Jews who, they believe, have deprived them of their patrimony.

At the end of Israel's War of Liberation, Jordan remained in possession of Judea and Samaria (which were renamed "The West Bank") and the eastern part of Jerusalem. Egypt remained in control of the densely populated Gaza Strip.

**Prosperity despite unending attacks.** But Israel was not allowed to live in peace. Virtually without interruption, it was victimized by attacks from Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt. There were two major wars: the Six Day War of 1967 and the Yom Kippur War of 1973. Israel prevailed in both. It acquired major territories, most of which, in its never-ending quest for peace, it returned. Following these unsuccessful wars, the Palestinians subjected Israel to almost uninterrupted "intifadas," essentially one-sided civil wars, in which suicide bombings and other assorted terrors were the main weapons.

> "Then the dream could finally be fulfilled . . . Milk and Honey could indeed flow."

Despite these unending tribulations and absorbing close to 4 million migrants from all parts of the world, Israel prospered mightily. Its population is now close to 8 million. Over 1 million of them are Arabs. They are Israeli citizens, have all the rights of their fellow Jewish citizens, serve in the Knesset (Israel's parliament) and in the diplomatic corps. They are full participants in the economic prosperity that permeates Israel. Israel's product per person is on the same or higher order as that of most European countries. It is a center of science and of culture. Its industrial output encompasses some of the most advanced technology and sophisticated production in the world. Next to Canada, Israel is the most represented country on US stock exchanges. Most major high-tech companies have facilities – factories and research establishments – in Israel.

All of this is admirable, of course. But there is a flip side to this edifying story. That is the fate of the Arab descendants of those who fled Israel in the 1948 War of Liberation. Had they followed the example of the Jews and agreed to the partition decreed by the U.N., they could today be in the same advanced position as Israel, instead of the misery in which they live. Because there is no question that Israel would have been more than willing to enter into a federation with Palestine, in which citizens of both countries could peacefully partake in common prosperity.

Can that dream still come true? Of course it can! Israel has accepted virtually all of the "conditions" for reconciliation on which the Palestinians have insisted, with the sole exception of the demand for the "right of return." That "right" would swamp Israel with hundreds of thousands or even millions of Arabs. The country could not absorb them and it would with one stroke be the end of Israel as the Jewish state. Even for the thorny question of Jerusalem a compromise could be found. But, having been misled by the thuggish Arafat for decades, Arab Palestine needs a wise leader in order to finally make peace with Israel. Arab children could study at Israel's splendid universities and technical schools, instead of learning the "science" of martyrdom and the "skills" of suicide bombing. Then the dream could finally be fulfilled and peace and prosperity could be extended over all of the Promised Land. Milk and Honey could indeed flow.

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# Private Opinions

*How soldiers really vote.*

Last Thursday, the *Military Times* released the results of a survey showing that members of the armed services planned to vote for John McCain over Barack Obama by a factor of nearly three to one—this at a time when the Democratic nominee was handily beating his Republican rival in almost all national polls. The survey apparently reaffirmed the long-held conventional wisdom that the U.S. military overwhelmingly backs the GOP. As Peter Feaver, a political science professor at Duke, told the paper: "The military has been perceived as a conservative Republican institution. A lot of people thought that eight years of frustration with the Bush administration was going to undermine that. This evidence suggests that it hasn't undermined it as much as they thought, at least not yet."

The truth about the military's politics, however, is more complex and all too often obscured by narrowly focused polling. Participants in the *Military Times* survey, for example, tended to be white, older, and more senior in rank—that is, they were hardly a representative sampling of the armed services. Another oft-cited study, conducted in 1998 by Feaver and Richard Kohn, found that 64 percent of military leaders identified themselves as ideologically conservative. While this was a groundbreaking study of senior officer attitudes, the data told us little about what the vast majority of military personnel—soldiers and non-commissioned officers—believe. After all, officers constitute only 14 percent of Army personnel; and only 6 percent hold the rank of major or higher.

In a study of the Army that I conducted in 2004 with my colleague, Professor Robert Shapiro, I tried to get a fuller picture of the social and political attitudes of soldiers, producing the first and only random-sample survey to canvass enlisted personnel and junior officers, as well as their superiors. Broadening the survey yielded results that fly in the face of the conventional view. The Army, it turns out, is hardly a bastion of right-wing thought.

It is true that the upper echelons of the military tilt right. My own research confirmed that about two-thirds of majors and higher-ranking officers identify as conservative, as previous studies found. But that tilt becomes far less pronounced when you expand the pool of respondents. That is because only 32 percent of the Army's enlisted soldiers consider themselves conservative, while 23 percent identify as liberal and the remaining 45 percent are self-described moderates. These numbers closely mirror the ideological predilections of the civilian population. According to data collected in 2004 by the Annenberg Public Policy Center, 37 percent of the civilian, non-veteran population identified as conservative, 24 percent as liberal, and the remaining 39 percent as moderate or undecided.

The political differences between officers and enlisted personnel can be partly explained by a demographic divide. Whereas officers are predominantly white, have at least a bachelor's degree, and draw incomes that place them in the middle or upper-middle class, the enlisted ranks have a higher proportion of minorities, make less money than officers, and typically enter service with only a high school diploma.

Nevertheless, even when controlling for factors like race and gender, officers are significantly more likely than soldiers to identify as conservative. They do not, however, share a uniformly right-wing outlook on social and political issues. Interestingly, self-identified conservative officers often supplied moderate responses when asked about spending on Social Security, health care, and education. The same held for social issues such as the role of women in the workplace, affirmative action, gun control, and the death penalty. In fact, one-third of the officers who answered such questions in a consistently liberal manner still said they were conservative, suggesting that self-identification as a conservative may be as much a cultural norm among officers as a reflection of ideological preference. Soldiers and non-commissioned officers, on average, also gave moderate responses to questions on social issues. They were,



David Cowles

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however, more likely than officers to have liberal attitudes on economic issues.

In addition to its ideological moderation, the Army is not as partisan as popularly portrayed. Whereas 65 percent of Americans think of themselves as either Republican or Democrat, according to the Annenberg survey, my study shows that only 43 percent of the military identifies with one of the two major political parties. Two out of three officers consider themselves either Republican or Democrat, but only 37 percent of enlisted personnel do so.

Officers tend to be not only more partisan, but also more Republican, with GOP affinity strongest among the highest ranks. While I was unable to fully parse the reason for this, the evidence strongly suggests the pattern is generational. Today's senior officers entered the Army during the late 1970s and 1980s, a time when the Republican Party had a strong advantage on issues of national defense and the Democratic Party was seen as anti-war if not anti-military. By contrast, junior officers who joined the Army after 2001 are almost as likely to be Democrats as they are Republicans, foreshadowing a possible shift in officer attitudes.

The Bush administration's record may be speeding that shift. A few weeks before the 2006 midterm elections, I attended a class at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, with a group of majors from across the services. On the first day, a naval officer noted that his favorite politician was Attila the Hun. Later, during a break, he asked if anyone wanted to attend a rally featuring Vice President Dick Cheney. As someone who has spent a lot of time thinking about civilian perceptions of the military, I was pleased to find, in real life, someone who represented a common stereotype. However, a few weeks later, after the Democratic tidal wave in the midterm congressional elections, the same officer noted his pleasure with the outcome because it meant greater accountability for President Bush.

While just an anecdote, this story is representative of several trends. During the 2006 election, the congressional district that includes Fort Leavenworth, containing a high number of military retirees in addition to a few thousand active-duty personnel, elected a Democrat for the first time since 1994, surprising observers. Several national polls of military families indicated that this group was suddenly trending toward the Democratic Party. And other surveys showed that, for the first time in a generation, the public had more confidence in the Democrats' ability to defend the country.

To be sure, the Democratic Party still has a stigma to overcome. In 2004, whatever their ideological inclination, only 11 percent of Army personnel identified as Democrats, compared with 33 percent of the civilian population. Between 2004 and 2006, self-identification with the Republican Party among senior Army officers did drop 16 percent. (The last time attitudes swung so wildly was during the Carter administration, when the military moved decisively into the Republican column.) But Democrats have yet to profit from this disillusionment. Between 2004 and 2007, the proportion of senior officers identifying as Democrats only increased from 11 to 13 percent.

How does party loyalty affect how the Army does its job? Officers seem to form their opinions on the appropriate uses of the military independent of partisan affiliation. That said, Republican officers predominantly feel that spending on defense should be expanded, while Democratic officers are divided on the issue. Officers also split along partisan lines on homeland security spending and foreign aid, though not to the same degree as on the defense budget. These findings suggest that officers do not necessarily approach questions of national security from a unified and internally developed perspective, but may default to partisan cues when thinking about these issues. As the officer corps becomes more politically diverse, disagreement about certain elements of defense policy could intensify.

This new diversity among military leaders—as well as recognition of existing diversity among the rank and file—presents both an opportunity and a challenge. The realization that the military vote is up for grabs will increase Democratic and Republican attempts to court uniformed votes and to prominently use veterans in their campaigns, challenging the military's reputation for apolitical service. On the other hand, it will help replace the stereotype of the right-wing American soldier with a more nuanced understanding of how soldiers think, reinforcing the ideal that the Army is a servant of the country and beholden to neither political party.

Jason Dempsey

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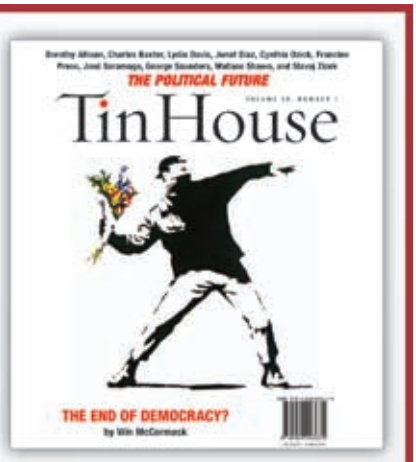
*Jason Dempsey is an infantry officer assigned to the Army's 10th Mountain Division. This article is based on his forthcoming book, Our Army: Soldiers, Politics and American Civil-Military Relations. The views presented here are his own and do not reflect the views of the U.S. Army or the Department of Defense.*


Two decades ago, Francis Fukuyama proclaimed the triumph of liberal democratic capitalism in "The End of History?" Now, in the first political issue of renowned literary journal *Tin House*, editor in chief Win McCormack wonders whether liberal democracy can survive at all. Slavoj Žižek, Markos Moulitsas, Cynthia Ozick, Thomas Frank, and Eduardo Galeano weigh in on related subjects.

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## Make It Work

*A moneyman's lament.*

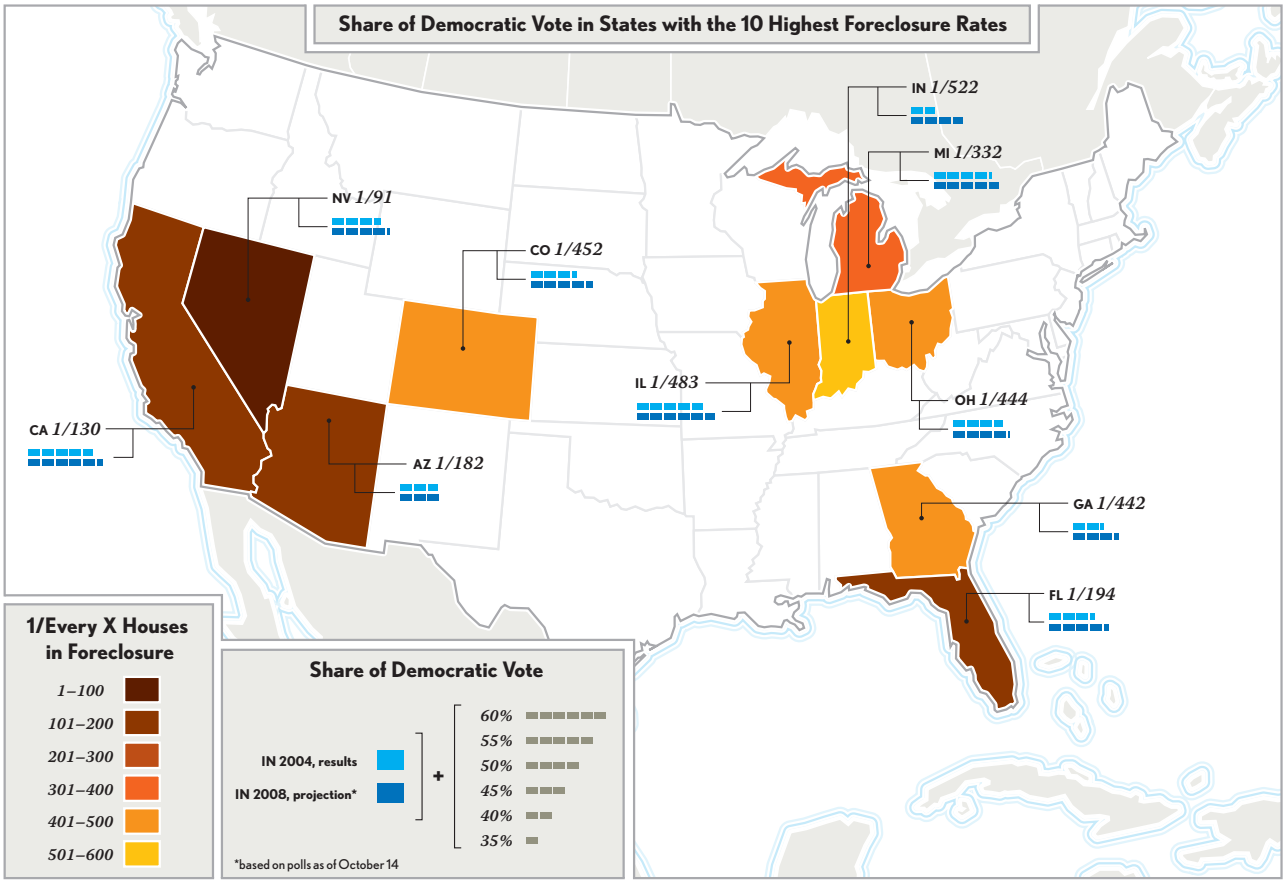
We are now on our second multibillion-dollar plan to bail out Wall Street. The Bush administration has abandoned the free-market ideology that laid the groundwork for the crisis, acknowledging that nothing less than wholesale intervention can prevent a complete collapse of the global financial system. Yet the question remains: Have we finally regained control of the economy? Nobody knows for sure, but, with its move to restore trust in the banking system, the United States will certainly ease the credit crunch. Now it is up to the banks in which Uncle Sam is becoming a shareholder to do their part. Wall Street must go back to its roots, and, instead of financing the kind of speculative trading activities and excessively leveraged transactions that led to this crisis, it must finance a revitalization of the U.S. economy. It must set the table for a new world economic order that rewards productive investment instead of speculation.

By now, an endless stream of pundits have explained that markets are built on confidence, by which they mean confidence in the promises that market participants make to each other. In his insightful new book, *Fixing Global Finance*, Martin Wolf of the *Financial Times* describes the financial system as "a pyramid of promises." The credit markets seized up because investors and institutions lost confidence in the ability of their counterparties to keep such promises—that is, confidence in the ability of borrowers to repay loans. The only way to guarantee such promises and get the financial sector back on its feet was for the government to stand behind them, which is precisely what the Bush administration has now done—and what it should have done in the first place.

From the beginning, the $700 billion plan to buy impaired mortgage loans was poorly conceived. Its biggest flaw was that financial institutions carry most of these securities on their books at far above their current market value. Accordingly, if the government paid a fair price for them, the institutions would incur huge losses—and perhaps be rendered insolvent. Alternatively, if the government paid a higher price, it would effectively be giving American taxpayers' money away to these institutions. Moreover, there are trillions of dollars of bad mortgage paper

## Foreclosing the Polls

Swing states like Nevada, Colorado, and Ohio are represented disproportionately among the ten states with the highest foreclosure rates, and they're also some of the states that are poised to move most aggressively toward Barack Obama. The current forecasts at *FiveThirtyEight.com* have Obama projected to outperform John Kerry's vote share in all ten states, and significantly beating him in places like Florida, Georgia, and Indiana. *Nate Silver*



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in the market; $700 billion wouldn't even make a dent in the problem.

Injecting $250 billion into financial institutions in return for an equity stake is a far more efficient use of American taxpayers' capital because each of these dollars will be loaned and re-loaned multiple times. We can expect each dollar to create approximately ten dollars of economic activity, making approximately $2.5 trillion of capital available for the economy if the firms that receive government investments do what they are supposed to and begin making loans again. Rather than spend the other $450 billion buying toxic mortgage paper at prices that are going to either inflict huge losses on banks or cheat the taxpayer, the government should keep that ammunition in reserve to prompt future lending if the first $250 billion does not do the trick.

In addition to building trust and injecting capital, the government needs to give financial institutions time to rebuild their balance sheets. This will require two steps. First, central banks must further cut interest rates so that banks can increase the profit they make from lending money. Second, the government must temporarily suspend mark-to-market accounting in which the balance-sheet value of an asset is reduced to reflect its current market value. In today's market, there is no way to accurately value the trillions of dollars of mortgage and mortgage-related paper and derivatives that are cluttering balance sheets, so why drive the world into insolvency trying?

As banks begin to regain their stability, we need broad regulatory reforms to insure that the past weeks are not the prelude to an even greater catastrophe. These reforms should start with the huge market for credit default swaps. A credit default swap, or CDS, is an insurance policy in which one party agrees to protect another party against the default of a bond, loan, or mortgage. This market, which is completely unregulated, has grown to an unimaginable $55 trillion, and includes many insuring parties that are incapable of making good on their obligations. (In one case now before the New York state courts, UBS Securities is suing a hedge fund that promised to insure $1.3 billion of debt. There was only one problem—the hedge fund had only $200 million!) Even more frightening, no central organization knows who owes what to whom in the CDS market. Thankfully, a clearinghouse that will require full disclosure of all CDS positions is currently being formed. Once that is done, the government must institute capital requirements to insure that all parties writing credit insurance contracts are capable of making good on their promises.

Finally, we must limit the freedom of financial firms to leverage themselves to the point where their failure can cause systemic damage. Bear Stearns was 30 times leveraged when it ran into trouble, and Lehman Brothers was well over 20 times leveraged when it finally collapsed. Over the past year, several hedge fund failures roiled the markets: Sowood Capital Management, LP; Carlyle Capital Corp.; and Peloton Partners LLP were three of the largest casualties. Each was leveraged at least four times over, and, in Carlyle's case, more than 30 times. Ten times is probably the upper limit of leverage that any bank should bear, and the limit should be lower for hedge funds. It is now abundantly clear that the free market will not regulate leverage on its own. An illusion had developed on Wall Street that this generation of investment managers possessed a new kind of genius, but, in truth, the only thing these managers did differently was to apply more leverage to the same old investment strategies in a bull market. When the laws of investment gravity brought the markets back to Earth, their spaceships crashed on the rest of us.

Wall Street as we knew it is gone, and that is not a bad thing. The government should use its new power not simply to restore the status quo ante, but to craft a new economy. Over the past three decades, an increasing amount of America's financial and intellectual capital has been devoted to speculative rather than productive activities—betting on much but producing little. This is no accident—it was the result of tax and fiscal policies that rewarded certain types of investments over others (i.e., debt over equity). Those policies should be redesigned to create the proper incentives to direct America's economic, intellectual, and creative energies toward rebuilding our physical infrastructure, cleaning our environment, rebuilding schools and neighborhoods, solving medical and scientific problems, and, most importantly, reducing our dependence on fossil fuels. There is more than enough productive work to keep our economy growing for decades to come. This crisis has given us the best opportunity in a generation to redirect America's energies. It will only become a tragedy if we squander it.

*Michael E. Lewitt*

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*Michael E. Lewitt, a money manager, is editor of The HCM Market Letter.*


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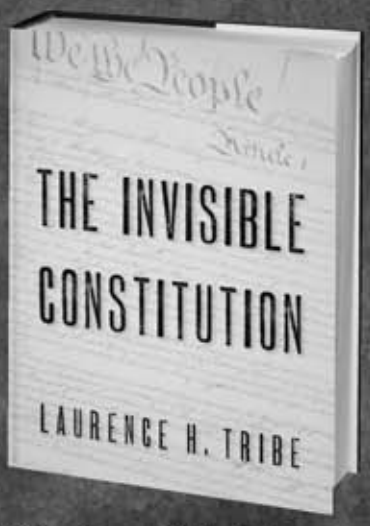


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# The Message Keeper

*How David Axelrod learned to conquer race.*

JASON ZENGERLE

*Barack Obama and his chief campaign strategist, David Axelrod, embrace after Obama's acceptance speech at the Democratic Convention.*

CALLIE SHELL/AURORA PHOTOS

In 1992, a Chicago woman named Bettylu Saltzman met Barack Obama, who had graduated from Harvard Law School one year earlier and was now in her city leading a voter-registration drive called Project Vote. Saltzman, an heiress to a shopping-mall fortune who's long been active in Democratic politics, was volunteering for Bill Clinton's presidential bid when, one day, Obama dropped by the campaign's Chicago office to discuss Project Vote. Saltzman came away from the encounter very, very impressed. "It could have been because I was working in a presidential campaign that I was thinking this way," Saltzman recently recalled for me, "but, after meeting Barack, I told a number of people that I thought he'd be president some day, and he'd be our first black president."

One of the people Saltzman told was David Axelrod, whom she had first gotten to know while working on Paul Simon's victorious 1984 U.S. Senate campaign, which Axelrod, at the age of 29, had managed. Since then, Axelrod had gone on to become Saltzman's good friend (they have Chicago Bulls season tickets next to each other) and the preeminent Democratic political and media consultant in Chicago, having spearheaded Richard M. Daley's recent election as mayor. Intrigued, Axelrod soon set up a meeting with Obama. For him, it was little more than a favor to a friend and, possibly, a political scouting trip. But, for the 30-year-old Obama, who had come to Chicago with dreams of becoming mayor himself, it was a crucial encounter with the person who could help him achieve that ambition.

Initially, though, Obama failed to make the sort of impression on Axelrod that he had made on Saltzman. Although their meeting led to the two becoming friends who would socialize and play basketball together, Obama and Axelrod's relationship was more personal than political—with Axelrod always maintaining a professional distance from Obama during the early years of Obama's political career. To be sure, Obama used Axelrod as an informal sounding board when he ran for the state Senate and got Axelrod to host a fund-raiser for him when his district was redrawn to include Axelrod's downtown neighborhood. But, despite his best efforts, Obama was unable to convince Axelrod to take him on as a client. When he ran for Congress in 2000, trying to unseat Bobby Rush, Axelrod sat on the sidelines. Ostensibly, Axelrod took a pass because he didn't want his working for Obama to be construed as payback by Daley, whom Rush had unsuccessfully challenged for mayor the year before. But Chris Sautter, an Axelrod friend who wound up working as Obama's media consultant on that losing campaign, says, "I think David was also pretty down on Obama's chances." And, a few years later, when Obama first approached Axelrod about joining his 2004 campaign for the U.S. Senate, Axelrod demurred. Indeed, according to David Mendell's biography of Obama, Axelrod told Obama to forget about statewide office altogether. "If I were you," he advised, "I would wait until Daley retires and then look at a mayor's race."



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But Obama kept courting Axelrod, because Axelrod had proven the master of the key to Obama's political future: He knew how to sell black candidates to white voters. It's a formula Axelrod developed working on a series of black mayoral candidates' campaigns in cities such as Cleveland, Detroit, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C. Once Obama finally won him over, in 2002, Axelrod used it to elect Obama to the U.S. Senate. And now, with Axelrod serving as the Obama campaign's chief political and media strategist, that formula is poised to send the first African American to the White House. "It was always very important to Barack to have Axelrod in his corner," says Valerie Jarrett, a close friend of Obama's and now a senior adviser to his campaign. "He thought Axelrod would bring just the right expertise to the equation."

His political consulting career may seem charmed, but Axelrod's life has been marked by tragedy. When he was 19 years old and a junior at the University of Chicago, his father, a New York City psychologist—"my best friend and hero," as Axelrod once described him—committed suicide. Later, Axelrod experienced the other side of paternal despair, when his daughter Lauren suffered epileptic seizures that left her with irreversible brain damage. Later still, his wife Susan, who runs an organization that promotes epilepsy research, waged a harrowing but successful battle with breast cancer. "A lot of people who enter public life have some kind of difficult situation in their pasts—they come from broken homes, their fathers left, they're orphans—and they're looking for something in public life they didn't get in their personal lives," says one Axelrod friend. "Because David's experienced his own tragedies, there's just an empathetic quality and ability to commiserate with some of these folks and to channel their energy and message in constructive ways."

Axelrod began his career as a political reporter for the *Chicago Tribune*, but, in 1984, he left journalism and, after his work on Simon's campaign, opened his own political and media consulting firm in Chicago. "There are some disadvantages to being in Chicago when you're competing for federal races with the inside-the-Beltway firms," says John Kupper, who's worked with Axelrod since 1988. "We ended up doing more non-federal races, like mayoral races. We made a virtue out of necessity." Of course, the racial demographics of America's cities also necessitated Axelrod working for an unusual number of African American candidates. "The fact is, in most major cities these days, the voting majority is minority," Kupper explains. "So, as we've gone along here and picked up mayoral races, a lot of the clients have been African Americans."

Unlike many consultants, who impose their own messages and buzzwords on candidates—so much so that their clients all begin to sound alike—Axelrod is known for crafting campaigns that are centered on, and uniquely suited to, his candidates' biographies. As a result, when the mustachioed, disheveled Axelrod goes on television to offer spin, he tends to sound like his clients. "Even in casual conversation, he begins adopting the tone and language of the candidate he's working with," says Gordon Fischer, a former chairman of the Iowa Democratic Party who's worked alongside Axelrod on several campaigns. Or, as GOP consultant Mark McKinnon, who teamed up with Axelrod on a Houston mayoral race in 1991 back when McKinnon was a Democrat, put it to me: "David just does a Vulcan mind meld with his candidates." This ability to understand his clients has become one of Axelrod's greatest selling points. Former Iowa governor Tom Vilsack remembers interviewing Axelrod to work on his 1998 campaign. "His shirt was kind of untucked and his hair was a little bit windblown. He walked in and I said to myself, 'This guy kind of looks like me; if he looks like me, I bet he can sell me.'"

Even those politicians who look nothing like Axelrod believe he's able to relate to them. "There are very few people who happen to be white who are sensitive and willing to give their all and commit themselves to candidates of color," says Dennis Archer, the former mayor of Detroit and one of the many black mayoral candidates who relied on Axelrod's services. "Some come in with a pejorative sense and treat the candidate in a pejorative way, and you don't have the full, committed respect that David has displayed."

In 1989, Axelrod served as the political and media strategist for Michael White, a black Ohio state senator, in his bid for mayor of Cleveland. As Cleveland was the first major U.S. city to elect a black mayor—Carl B. Stokes in 1967—White's campaign was hardly unprecedented. Indeed, White's opponent in the general election, the president of Cleveland's city council, George Forbes, was also black. Because he couldn't count on an overwhelming number of black votes, White needed to win a sizable share of whites. The hot-tempered Forbes ran an aggressively negative campaign, accusing White of being a "slum landlord" and of abusing his former wife. But Axelrod realized that the key for White was not responding to those attacks and reducing the campaign to a contest between two angry black men—even when White was understandably tempted to do so. "When you have someone beating your brains out, the human temptation is, 'I'm going to go out in the middle of the ring and pulverize this guy,'" White says. "David's advice was to avoid doing that. He was right, of course, but you're not always so logical when you're bleeding." In fact, the story of White's personal growth—in which he matured from a militant student leader at Ohio State University in the early '70s into a mild-mannered MPA who refused to mix it up with Forbes—became a centerpiece of his campaign. "I spent some time being mad," he would say. "But I channeled my anger into constructive change."

Axelrod believed the other crucial vehicle for winning his candidate the votes of Cleveland's white residents was what he's called "third-party authentication"—in other words, endorsements from respected individuals or institutions that whites put a lot of stock in. "David felt there almost had to be a permission structure set up for certain white voters to consider a black candidate," explains Ken Snyder, a Democratic consultant and Axelrod protégé. In Cleveland, that was the city's daily newspaper, *The Plain Dealer*. Largely on the basis of *The Plain Dealer*'s endorsement and his personal story, White went on to defeat Forbes with 81 percent of the vote in the city's white wards.

Ten years later, Axelrod went to work on John Street's campaign for Philadelphia mayor. The candidate whom Street most resembled was White's old opponent, Forbes. Like Forbes, Street was the president of the city council who was infamous for his temper: As a young councilman, he had once shoved a TV reporter and thrown water in someone's face. Street needed a significant share of the white vote to win the race. In order to get that, he'd need to erase white Philadelphians' image of him as a hothead. Axelrod's strategy for doing this centered on Street's TV ads—which took a then-unusual documentary approach. "David would sit there for hours literally conducting interviews with Street, with Street looking just slightly off-camera answering David's questions," recalls Snyder, who was Street's campaign spokesman. "Then David would go back to the studio. It was a really hard jigsaw puzzle to put together—Street would say something nine seconds long and you only have seven



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seconds left in the spot—but David thought it was worth the time and effort spent because it allowed for voters to make a gut-level connection with Street. . . . It's hard to accept a stereotype about a person when he's in your living room talking to you and you see that he's a real living human being with a certain set of experiences you can relate to." Street wound up winning an achingly close race, with a final margin of victory of fewer than 8,000 votes (out of 425,000 cast).

In 2006, Axelrod faced what was at that point his biggest challenge in Deval Patrick's campaign for governor of Massachusetts. Unlike almost all of Axelrod's black mayoral clients, who were following in the footsteps of other black mayors in their respective cities, Patrick was running for an office no black politician in his state had ever reached before. Like most Axelrod campaigns, Patrick's focused more on the candidate's biography than policy: Patrick's most effective TV ad dwelled on his life story—"raised by a single mother," "worked his way up from poverty to Harvard Law"—while giving short shrift to, as it described them, Patrick's "honest ideas to lift our state." But, rather than try to downplay or defuse Patrick's race, Axelrod used it as part of his appeal to white voters, casting his bid to become Massachusetts's first black governor as an opportunity for voters to make history themselves. Rob Gray, a GOP consultant who helped run the campaign of Patrick's opponent, Kerry Healey, says: "Part of the Patrick campaign was challenging white voters who might feel somewhat guilty about racial attitudes in the state and the country to exorcise that guilt by voting for the African American candidate. . . . 'Making history' can be very motivational to people in terms of their voting behavior."

Around the time Axelrod was steering Patrick to victory in 2006, he was urging Obama to run for the White House in 2008. "David felt the time was right and the environment was right," says John Kupper. "You don't know if four or eight or twelve years down the line conditions will have changed and if they don't, whether there'll be a newer Obama." The self-described "keeper of the message" for Obama's presidential bid has taken the lessons he learned from his mayoral and gubernatorial campaigns and made them cohere into something that approaches a unified theory of how to elect a black candidate—emphasizing biography, using third-party authentication, attacking with an unconventional sideways approach, letting voters connect to the candidate by speaking to them directly in ads, and telling voters that supporting the black candidate puts them on the right side of history.

In the fall of 2007, pundits and Obama supporters, frustrated by what they perceived as a listless campaign, worried that Obama's run might be over before it had even really begun. They urged Obama to take the fight to Clinton in personal terms, but Obama refused. That didn't mean, however, that he didn't go negative on Clinton; rather, he went negative in a way that was subtle enough so as not to mark himself as angry. "I remember Obama would have this riff, where he was like, what we need is change, not old-style thinking; conviction, not triangulation," says former Clinton adviser Howard Wolfson. "And all the things we needed were him, all the things we didn't need were us. And yet he never said our name. It was brilliantly effective."

The week before Super Tuesday, caught in a delegate-by-delegate race against Clinton, Obama deployed perhaps the most powerful third-party authenticators in the Democratic Party, Ted and Caroline Kennedy. It wasn't the first time the scion of an iconic white Democratic family had been used by Axelrod on Obama's behalf. In his 2004 campaign for the Senate, Axelrod recognized how important it was for Obama to have the support of someone white Illinois voters trusted, and he had lined up Paul Simon to play that role. But, when Simon passed away after heart surgery, Axelrod enlisted Simon's daughter Sheila, a city councilwoman in Carbondale, instead; the ad Sheila Simon made, in which she said that Obama and her father were "cut from the same cloth," has been credited with helping to spark a 20-point leap in the polls for Obama. And, as the presidential primary season trudged along, female authenticators like Kathleen Sebelius and Janet Napolitano became his most familiar surrogates. Even the sea of diverse but mostly white faces standing behind Obama on risers at his campaign events—a tableau that is carefully arranged by Obama campaign aides—serves as a form of third-party authentication.

In early September, following the GOP convention and McCain's rise in the polls, the Obama campaign faced its most difficult juncture since it was urged to attack Hillary Clinton. Many Democrats were in a panic over Obama's refusal to match McCain attack for attack. But, like the White campaign in Cleveland that Axelrod ran, the Obama campaign took a different approach—responding instead with ads that tried to turn McCain's negative attacks against him by denouncing them as a distraction and dishonorable. "There are certain things we're not going to say in ads," explains John Del Cecato, a partner in Axelrod's firm who is a media adviser to Obama's campaign. "I think sometimes people don't understand our strategy: They think it's either go for the jugular or you're treating them with kid gloves. There is an in-between."

Again and again, the ads that the Obama campaign has unveiled at the race's most critical moments—on the eve of the Iowa caucus, in the aftermath of the global financial meltdown—have featured the candidate talking in an informal manner directly to the camera, much like John Street did in Philadelphia. By doing so, Obama has tried to show that he's relatable and reasonable—not the radical figure white voters may have read about on the Internet and nothing like their worst images of black politicians. The ads that have featured pictures of Obama as a child with his white mother and grandparents and footage of him as an adult easily interacting with white voters (Axelrod has had camera crews following Obama at virtually all of his public appearances since 2003) have only served to reinforce that message. At the same time, Obama, like Patrick, has used his race to project a message of hope and change for voters who may be receptive to such a pitch. Indeed, one reason he's been able to be so vague and general in his promise of change is because the color of his skin serves as a constant reminder of just how concrete, in one way at least, that change would be.

With Obama ahead in the polls, that message that favors biography over policy looks as if it may be enough to get him to the White House. But what about afterward? After all, the electoral successes Axelrod has brought to his black clients have not always been matched by governing successes, as the troubled tenures of Street in Philadelphia and now Patrick in Massachusetts have shown. In fact, Axelrod's friends say it's not uncommon for him to grow disillusioned with his clients once they take office. (According to one friend, Axelrod has even confessed that, had Obama not run for the White House, he would have left political consulting altogether.) Will a President Obama somehow be different? And, if so, will Axelrod be in any way responsible for that difference? He's said that he has no plans to work in an Obama White House and that he intends to remain in Chicago. If he's able to make good on Bettylu Saltzman's long-ago prediction, perhaps David Axelrod will feel his job is done. ◆



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# McJustice

*Liberals' long-feared judicial apocalypse is nigh.*

**JEFFREY ROSEN**

AP PHOTO/J. SCOTT APPLEWHITE, FILE

DURING EVERY PRESIDENTIAL campaign for the last two decades, liberals have predicted an apocalypse in the Supreme Court. In their dire visions, as many as four justices are always about to retire, meaning that a Republican victory would turn the court radically to the right and lead to the certain overturning of *Roe* v. *Wade*.

In each of the past three elections, of course, these hyperbolic predictions have turned out to be wrong. Since 1996, *Roe* has been supported by a comfortable 6–3 majority, and the Court, controlled by two relatively moderate swing justices, Sandra Day O'Connor and now Anthony Kennedy, has remained fairly centrist. All of this had led some Court-watchers, including me, to conclude that the stakes for the Court in most presidential elections are less dire than many liberals fear.

Not this time. This year, for the first time since the New Deal era, a single election really does have the power to transform the Court—at the very moment that voters, rightly concerned about the tanking economy and the war in Iraq, are looking the other way. Given the fact that the older justices are liberal rather than conservative—and that the oldest, John Paul Stevens, is 88—it's hard to deny that nominations by John McCain would change the Court far more dramatically than those by Barack Obama. An Obama victory would maintain the current balance of the Court, while a McCain Court could create a solid conservative majority.

What's at stake is not only *Roe* v. *Wade*, but issues directly tied to the current concerns of the public: among them, Congress's power to regulate the economy as well as limits on the president's power to act unilaterally in the war on terrorism. Although McCain claims to favor justices who will defer to the political branches, the most likely Republican nominees are hardly consistent advocates of judicial deference. Voters who are hoping McCain will nominate relatively moderate judicial mavericks should think again.

IT'S TRUE THAT certain kinds of conservative nominees would change the Court more dramatically than others. Activist conservatives, who yearn for the resurrection of what they call the Constitution in Exile, would be far more likely to challenge Congress and to strike down a range of federal regulations, from health care and the environment to

LOU BEACH



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the economic bailout. By contrast, deferential conservatives, who believe in judicial minimalism across the board, would generally uphold laws passed by Congress as well as the states.

Many prominent conservatives are confident that McCain, who has never cared much about the judiciary, would placate his conservative base by appointing activist movement conservatives. "It's a standard move in Republican coalition politics for someone who might not be seen as a movement conservative—like John McCain and, initially, George W. Bush—to win the support of the conservative base by putting legal conservatives in charge of picking judges," says John Yoo, former deputy assistant attorney general in the Bush administration. (The head of McCain's judicial advisory committee, for instance, is Ted Olson, the former Bush solicitor general who argued and won *Bush* v. *Gore*.)

As examples of the kinds of justices McCain might appoint, Yoo mentions Janice Rogers Brown, the libertarian African American judge on the federal appellate court in Washington, D.C., whose extreme devotion to property rights makes her one of the most prominent advocates of the Constitution in Exile. Another candidate Yoo mentions is Edith Jones, an appellate judge in Texas. Jones is a blistering skeptic of federal power who dissented from a decision applying the Endangered Species Act to protect a rare species of underground bug. When I was in law school, there was a story, no doubt apocryphal, that Jones had the following message on her answering machine: "If you're calling for a clerkship interview, please leave a message; if you're calling for a death penalty stay, DENIED!"

Activist nominees like Brown and Jones would, of course, be strenuously resisted by a Democratic Senate, especially one with a filibuster-proof majority, but, after rejecting one or two sacrificial McCain nominees, the Senate would feel increasing political pressure to confirm a stealth nominee without an extensive paper trial. Stealth nominees tend to be movement conservatives, rather than principled devotees of judicial deference. And Senate Democrats, focused on *Roe* v. *Wade*, are unlikely to distinguish carefully between activist and deferential conservatives when it comes to congressional power.

So let's assume that McCain gets to appoint at least one activist conservative to the bench. How would America and the law be transformed? The most significant effect of a McCain Court could come in areas pitting the Court against federal regulations passed by Congress. Before the crash of 2008, the previous two most serious depressions in U.S. history—in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—triggered populist economic regulations by Congress and the states to protect citizens from the excesses of industrial capitalism. In both eras, conservative Supreme Court majorities struck down those regulations—from minimum-wage laws to parts of the New Deal—as an affront to property rights and limits on federal power. This triggered a political backlash from Americans convinced that the decisions were bad for the country.

The greatest danger posed by a McCain Court is that it might revive those now-discredited ideas. Some conservatives may challenge future regulations that Congress passes in the wake of the bailout as a violation of constitutional doctrines involving the separation of powers and prohibitions on broad delegations of congressional authority to the executive. In the current Roberts Court, these arguments are unlikely to persuade a majority of justices, but the addition of activist conservatives might change things. If a McCain Court struck down any of the regulations related to the economic crisis, it would produce not only economic chaos, but the first constitutional conflict with a Democratic Congress since the New Deal era.

McCain judges might also undermine a Democratic Congress in other ways—dismantling environmental and civil justice laws by judicial fiat. In the *Massachusetts* v. *EPA* case in 2007, in a 5–4 majority opinion written by Justice Stevens, the Court held that the Bush Environmental Protection Agency couldn't sidestep its congressionally mandated obligation to regulate pollutants, such as carbon dioxide, that cause global warming unless it could offer better scientific evidence against the connection between greenhouse-gas emissions and climate change. In a Court with appointees from President McCain, cases like this would come out the other way, allowing administrative agencies to ignore their regulatory obligations. Continuing the pattern established in the Exxon Valdez decision last year, a property-rights-minded McCain court might also take it on itself to impose, by judicial fiat, a laissez-faire agenda that has no national constituency—including measures such as tort reform or limitations on punitive damages. And there's little doubt that a McCain Court would further chip away at—if not entirely gut—McCain's own signature achievement in the Senate: campaign finance reform.

Although McCain nominees might challenge Congress, they would likely be far more deferential to the president. Like Roberts and Alito, most conservative judges favor broad deference to presidential powers in wartime, and, with the arrival of one more conservative justice, the recent closely divided cases that questioned President Bush's military tribunals—including the *Hamdan* and *Boumediene* cases, which McCain has denounced—might well be overturned. "McCain was one of the people who worked on the Military Commissions Act of 2006, which the Court struck down, so you would expect him to appoint justices who agree with his constitutional view of broad presidential powers," says Yoo. Since Anthony Kennedy has been the only vote standing between the Bush administration and carte blanche in the war on terrorism, a pro–presidential powers Court could mean that McCain would be much freer to surveil, detain, or interrogate suspected terrorists without judicial oversight.

Not all conservatives agree that either McCain or his judicial nominees would go as far as Bush in embracing a unilateralist view of executive authority. They point out that Antonin Scalia, for instance, has sometimes taken a more libertarian view of limits on the president's power than Clarence Thomas. Still, even if some McCain justices balked at endorsing the indefinite detention of American citizens, as Scalia has done, they are unlikely to be as confident in challenging the president and Congress in wartime as Kennedy. That could have dramatic consequences in cases that are now working their way up to the Court: Over the next few years, the Court may well hear a series of challenges to Bush terrorism polices, ranging from the Guantánamo trials to warrantless wiretapping to challenges to the use of predator drones to attack targets where civilians are killed. With the addition of a McCain-appointed justice or two, these cases would likely be decided in favor of the president.

At the same time that McCain judges might undermine Congress and favor the president, they would continue to expand the Roberts Court's suspicion of "regulation by litigation." Plaintiffs have filed more than 600 suits related to the subprime mortgage crisis in the past two years, and many of these are already faltering under the pro-corporate doctrines embraced by the Rehnquist and Roberts courts. In recent years, the Court has made it harder for lawsuits by investors to succeed, requiring specific allegations that corporate defendants knowingly deceived the market; another decision last January made it extremely difficult to



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sue accountants, lawyers, and other corporate advisers for securities fraud. The next round of suits may be against the bond ratings agencies that downplayed the risk of shaky mortgages, but those arguments are already being resisted on the grounds that the opinions of the rating agencies are a form of speech protected by the First Amendment. Then there will be the Monday morning quarterbacking of the banks that sold devalued commercial paper to the federal government too cheaply. Although the McCain Supreme Court would not be at the center of the many shareholder, disclosure, and fair-value-accounting suits triggered by the mortgage crisis, it could make it even harder for these suits to succeed at the very moment the country is demanding legal accountability.

If many conservatives are inconsistent in their devotion to judicial deference to the federal government—challenging Congress while deferring to the president—they are similarly inconsistent when it comes to deference to state legislators. Broadly, many conservatives want to second-guess the states when they pass progressive regulations—involving affirmative action, economic redevelopment, and gun control—while deferring to the states when they pass regulations favored by social conservatives involving religion and abortion. Which brings us to *Roe* v. *Wade*. This year, for the first time since the 1992 election, *Roe* really is hanging by a 5–4 thread. Would the appointment of one more conservative justice lead it to be overturned? During the confirmation hearings of John Roberts and Samuel Alito, I had resisted this conclusion, taking seriously their paeans to the importance of precedent. Perhaps they would chip away at *Roe* incrementally, I thought, without overturning it cleanly.

But this scenario may be too optimistic. When I asked Justice Stevens in 2007 whether he thought *Roe* would survive in his lifetime, he said: "Well, it's up to Justice Kennedy. I don't know about the two new justices"—Roberts and Alito—"but I kind of assume it may well be up to him." Stevens presumably knows more about the inclinations of Roberts and Alito than the rest of us. Also, the need to overturn *Roe* on principle is such an article of faith in conservative legal circles that it's not clear that Roberts and Alito would balk if presented with the opportunity by a solid conservative majority.

After overturning *Roe*, the most important social agenda item on many conservatives' Supreme Court wish list is banning affirmative action in nearly all circumstances. At the moment, the Court takes a Goldilocks approach to racial preferences: some but not too much. By 5–4 votes, it has allowed tailored race preferences in universities and law schools while restricting them in public schools, public contracting, and public employment. It also has upheld federal voting laws that sometimes require states to take race into account in constructing voting districts to protect the rights of minorities. One more conservative justice might lead to the overturning of the *Grutter* case, which upheld law school affirmative action by a 5–4 vote in 2003. If the McCain Court declared that the Constitution is always color-blind, the nuanced use of race would go out the window, and the results would be extraordinarily activist: Justice Stephen Breyer has counted more than 50 federal laws and 100 state laws that contain racial classifications, all of which might be in jeopardy.

Finally, there are two other perennial battlegrounds in the culture wars: God and guns. At the moment, a bare majority of five justices, led by Kennedy, believe that the Constitution forbids graduation prayers in public schools. A McCain Court might overturn *Lee* v. *Weisman*, which banned graduation prayers, and might extend the cases in which the Rehnquist Court was willing to tolerate ceremonial endorsements of religion in the public square, from the Ten Commandments to holiday crèches. Broadly, a McCain Court would be poised to reject the nuanced position of religious neutrality—which holds that government must treat religious and secular institutions on equal terms—and embrace a position of religious supremacy, which allows government to support religion, as long as it doesn't favor one faith over another. At the same time, the *Heller* decision, striking down D.C.'s gun ban, might well be extended to strike down far less draconian bans passed by various states.

Some conservatives defenders of judicial deference say they're not eager for a McCain Court to be activist as I've suggested it might be—declaring war on Congress, for example, and striking down affirmative action and regulations ranging from economic stability to gun control. "With the specific exception of *Roe*, we're more interested in preventing future liberal incursions than in undoing past ones, much less in achieving a conservative counterrevolution," says Ed Whelan of the Ethics and Public Policy Center. "If you could give me a grand deal that was binding where the Court would overturn *Roe* and not do all the bad things we fear from an Obama Court—including creating rights to gay marriage and cloning, striking down the death penalty, and stripping 'under God' from the Pledge of Allegiance—I would happily give up all the supposed gains that the left might fear from a conservative Court."

There are, in fact, principled conservative devotees of judicial deference who could make good justices and avoid the liberal nightmare scenarios I've described. For example, Judge J. Harvie Wilkinson III, who was on President Bush's Supreme Court shortlist, is a thoughtful Burkean conservative who recently wrote a devastating critique of Justice Scalia's majority opinion in the *Heller* gun case. Similarly, Michael McConnell of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit, a respected former law professor at the University of Chicago, is the leading conservative advocate of judicial deference to congressional power.

It seems unlikely, however, that McCain's first nominees would be deferential conservatives. Judicial deference doesn't have a broad constituency in either party, and McCain himself doesn't seem committed to it. In a speech at Wake Forest University in May, McCain included the usual conservative boilerplate attacks against "judicial activism." But his definition of activism was revealing. Like Sarah Palin, he singled out for criticism the *Kelo* case, which actually deferred to the choices of democratic majorities. In *Kelo*, the Court upheld the City of New London's decision to seize property for economic redevelopment—rejecting the property rights claims brought by libertarian opponents and other devotees of the Constitution in Exile. If *Kelo* is McCain's litmus test, he would be more likely to choose activist nominees like Janice Rogers Brown than restrained ones like Wilkinson or McConnell.

Although liberals have often cried wolf about the impact of presidential elections on the Supreme Court, sometimes the stakes have been just as high as liberals feared—think of the election of 1936, when Roosevelt's landslide reelection allowed him to appoint eight justices to replace the conservative majority that had struck down the New Deal. This year, liberals are in a perilous situation, where a conservative president could create a conservative Supreme Court majority for decades to come. In other words, those who have long been too concerned about the future of the Supreme Court finally have reason to worry. ◆



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# Survey Says...

*How many polls does it take to screw up an election?*

MICHAEL CROWLEY

At three o'clock on the afternoon of Wednesday, September 24, John McCain announced a bold move. He was suspending his campaign and rushing back to Washington to deal with the escalating financial crisis, even if it meant skipping a scheduled debate with Barack Obama that Friday night. The McCain campaign heralded the ploy as evidence that its man was a decisive leader who would put duty to his country above partisan politics.

But the move ran into instant p.r. trouble. Barely two hours after McCain's announcement, a snap poll appeared in the inboxes of reporters and political activists. A majority of Americans felt the debate should go ahead as planned, while just 10 percent thought it should be postponed. By 5:17 p.m., the poll had been posted on the popular liberal blog *Talking Points Memo* under the headline AMERICANS RESPOND TO MCCAIN STUNT. Before Republicans could even spin on the prime-time airwaves, the poll laid the foundation for an insta-consensus that McCain's move was a politically motivated stunt that wasn't fooling anyone.

The man who soured McCain's moment is a rotund former newspaper reporter and natty dresser named Jay Leve. He is the editor and founder of SurveyUSA, the polling firm that tested public reaction to McCain's gambit, and has conducted many dozens of other polls that have informed and infuriated political watchers this year. Although Leve has trademarked the phrase "America's Pollster®," he is just one among a fast-growing and fractious cadre of American pollsters spitting out numbers faster than Sarah Palin drops non sequiturs. On a typical day this fall, *RealClearPolitics*, a hub of news, opinion, and polling obsessively trafficked by political junkies, might feature 30 state and national presidential surveys. At least five different firms now conduct daily "tracking" polls to detect the slightest shifts of public opinion about the race. "We've seen a huge increase" in political polling, says Nancy Mathiowetz, a former president of the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR), the polling community's establishment body. In the 1960s, perhaps half a dozen firms conducted presidential surveys. Today, there are dozens.



Felix Sockwell

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Leve and his ilk are proliferating because an unprecedented demand exists for the information they peddle. An anxious, politically savvy public has developed a compulsive need to know precisely where the presidential contest stands at any given moment. The profusion of poll numbers in turn fuels the public's hunger for more definitive, or more reassuring, polls—a cycle made all the more relentless by a panoply of websites, such as *RealClearPolitics* and *Talking Points Memo*, that post every last number almost in real time.

This new, frenetic age of polling has not necessarily led to more empirical certainty. The very instantaneousness of polls like Leve's threatens to shape perceptions as much as record them. And the deluge of polling data has just given partisans another opportunity to cherry-pick facts and impugn their rivals. In this besieged environment, even pollsters themselves fight bitterly over the best way to measure public opinion and whether the likes of Jay Leve have it exactly right—or very, very wrong.

Less than an hour after Leve released his snap McCain poll, Mark Blumenthal, a longtime Democratic pollster, was already attacking it. In a blog item posted at 5:53 p.m at *Pollster.com*, one of a handful of new websites dedicated to monitoring the booming polling biz, Blumenthal noted that many of the 1,000 adults contacted for the poll surely hadn't even heard the news of McCain's campaign suspension. (Leve's questions didn't mention McCain's gambit, asking only if the debate should continue in light of the economic crisis.) "It is an extreme stretch to treat a bunch of calls made over the span of an hour or two on a Wednesday afternoon as a representative snapshot of what 'Americans' are thinking," Blumenthal wrote.

Leve didn't appreciate the criticism. By 8 p.m., he had posted a comment under Blumenthal's item. "SurveyUSA's work in response to fast-breaking news is nothing short of remarkable," he wrote. "[I]f you are presented with data from a competing research firm that you feel does a better job of capturing this extraordinary moment in time, post that data and please delete ours." But Leve's salvo didn't address the question of the accuracy of his methodology—especially when it comes to his controversial brand of instantaneous polling.

On a recent September afternoon, with the Dow diving and McCain touting the economy's "strong" fundamentals, I drove about 20 miles west of Manhattan through the suburban sprawl of Verona, New Jersey, to visit Leve. SurveyUSA's offices are located in a small office park surrounded by trees. One level down the stairs, a receptionist buzzed me through the door and summoned Leve. The office, which was divided into a set of cubicles, was strangely empty.

Leve, 52, emerged from a back office with an extended hand and a smile. He wore a crisp white shirt and a matching orange necktie and suspenders. For added effect, his glasses had light orange frames, which matched the orangey stubble peppering his head and chin. Leve led me into his personal office. On one wall hung SurveyUSA's red and yellow logo, illuminated by a stage light, with a TV camera at the ready in case Leve was needed for a quick interview. Leve sat at his tidy desk and clicked open a computer screen to what resembled a train departures schedule. "There are four jobs running right now," he said softly, running his finger down the screen. "There's a poll in the state of Georgia—a Senate race down there. There's a poll being run in New Mexico for the presidential race. There's a poll in a congressional district in Pennsylvania." The fourth was a non-political marketing-research poll in the Seattle area.

All these polls were being conducted in a bedroom-sized chamber just outside Leve's door called "the vault," in recognition of its actual use back when a rare-coins dealer owned the space. Leve led me inside, and pointed to a corner. "We even kept one of his safes," he said with a smile. Leve doesn't use the old steel safe, but the vault is still an apt name because it currently guards the workhorses of Leve's business: a set of black IBM calling machines, each about the size of a stereo tuner and stacked horizontally in a pair of large metal cabinets. Each machine is capable of having as many as 288 phone lines plugged into its back, creating a messy tangle of multicolored wires running from the machines up into the ceiling. On a busy day, Leve explained, his machines might place a few hundred thousand calls for 30 different polls. (For this election, he is polling in 28 states.) Since Leve began conducting surveys in 1992, his machines have completed 24 million interviews. "If we were radiologists, you would want us to read your x-ray because we see so much data every day," he said.

While most pollsters employ real people—sitting in call centers, wearing headsets—to gather data for them, Leve relies on these machines. His innovation is to get news anchors from local television affiliates in the areas he's sampling to record scripts for him. A trusted anchor's voice conveys that the call is "legitimate, authentic, civic-minded, and not a scam," Leve says, and people are less likely to hang up on the call. (In return for their anchors' services, the affiliates get to make use of Leve's findings.) A SurveyUSA poll is like an airline's automated customer-assistance system—*press one if you support John McCain, press two for Barack Obama*—except that you receive the call instead of placing it. With the raw results in hand, Leve will make some technical adjustments and write an analysis, which he will send to one of the more than 50 media outlets that commission his work and feature it in their print and television news stories. This sort of computerized polling is controversial—but also increasingly popular, thanks to its lightning speed and low cost. "Gallup might charge $10,000 and take four to five days," Leve boasts. "We can do that in one night, for maybe a thousand dollars."

This insight has made Leve a very successful pollster. But the St. Louis native originally set out to become a reporter, not a pollster. After getting a journalism degree from Northwestern, he even worked briefly at *The Miami Herald* before he was lured into a short-lived experiment with transmitting news via telephone. Leve soon made a career around interactive data, including designing more customer-friendly ATMs for Citibank. Three years after the 1987 market crash cost him his job, he started his own polling firm. At the time, automated polling was a relatively new technology, and Leve became one of its early adopters. The site of his Verona office complex was chosen for its then-unusual access to the fiber optic wiring that would support his huge volume of phone calls.

The U.S. polling industry has long been dominated by a staid old guard, one that did not welcome Leve to its ranks with open arms. Campaign polling first emerged in the 1930s, led by *Literary Digest*, which mailed millions of postcards to Americans asking how they intended to vote. The pollster establishment was a clubby lot, holding private gatherings where they sang and drank into the late hours. But they also prided themselves on their commitment to the idea of a social science that used slow and laborious techniques. Even today, major polling firms like Gallup can spend days collecting and

*continued on page 26*



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# *Does the free market corrode moral character?*

## To the contrary.

**I can attest from personal experience that, if you try to talk about the free market** on today's university campuses, you will be buried in an avalanche of criticism of globalization. The opposition of faculty and students to the expansion of international markets stems largely from a sense of altruism. It proceeds from their concern about

social and moral issues. Simply put, they believe that globalization lacks a human face. I take an opposite view. Globalization, I would argue, leads not only to the creation and spread of wealth but to ethical outcomes and to better moral character among its participants.

Many critics believe that globalization sets back social and ethical agendas, such as the reduction of child labor and poverty in poor countries and the promotion of gender equality and environmental protection everywhere. Yet, when I examined these and other issues in my book, *In Defense of Globalization*, I found that the actual outcomes were the opposite of those feared.

For example, many believed that poor peasants would respond to the greater economic opportunities presented by globalization by taking their children out of school and putting them to work. Thus considered, the extension of the free market would act as a malign force…

CONTINUED ONLINE.

*Jagdish Bhagwati is University Professor of economics and law at Columbia University, senior fellow for international economics at the Council on Foreign Relations, and the author of* In Defense of Globalization. *He writes widely on public policy and international trade.*

## Certainly. Or does it?

**It is clear that the ferocious competition of interests and passions, the mad rule of** money, and materialism as the measure of all things — in short, the free market, released from all rules and governed only by the greed of the most powerful — fatally corrodes our souls. This is what the great Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn thought at the end of his life.

This view was shared by the family of French thinkers of the 1930s called the "non-conformists," which included Charles Péguy and a few others. They saw commodity exchange as a source of depersonalization.

It was also the thesis of an entire group of Christian (or simply spiritualist) thinkers who saw in the idea of the "free market" the death of moral values and the end of man's faith and aspiration to the absolute…

CONTINUED ONLINE.

*Bernard-Henri Lévy, the French philosopher, has written more than thirty books, including the* New York Times *bestseller* American Vertigo *(2006) and, most recently,* Left in Dark Times: A Stand Against the New Barbarism *(2008), both published by Random House.*

## We'd rather not know.

**Most of us are consumers who try to get the best possible deals in the market. Most of** us are also moral beings who try to do the right things in our communities and societies. Unfortunately, our market desires often conflict with our moral commitments. So how do we cope with this conflict?

All too often, we avoid it. We would rather the decisions we make as consumers not reflect upon our moral characters. That way we don't have to make uncomfortable choices between the products and services we want and the ideals to which we aspire.

For example, when the products we want can be made most cheaply overseas, the best deals we can get in the marketplace may come at the expense of our own neighbors' jobs and wages…

CONTINUED ONLINE.

*Robert B. Reich is professor of public policy at the University of California at Berkeley. He has published twelve books on public policy and has served in three national administrations, most recently as secretary of labor under President Bill Clinton.*

## No.

**In fact, markets require moral character if they are to be truly free, and truly free markets, in** turn, promote moral character. But free markets are no guarantor of moral character. As today's cultural environment shows, the free market tends to heighten certain moral risks.

As a politician, I might seem less qualified to answer this

question than an economist. But as a politician, I have learned a great deal in the many years I've spent discussing freedom, morality, and economics with thousands of Americans. These experiences have taught me that the most important word in "free market" is "free" — that a free market is more of a political and moral reality than an economic one…

CONTINUED ONLINE.

*Rick Santorum, a U.S. Senator from Pennsylvania from 1995 to 2007 and a member of the U.S. House of Representatives from 1991 to 1995, contributes a twice-monthly column to the* Philadelphia Inquirer *and is a senior fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C.*

## Yes, too often.

**Critics rightfully grasp that the free market undermines the traditional, local arrange-**ments that people depend on to teach and sustain morality. Consider especially the experience of children. They first learn morality from their families, with whom they are most emotionally bonded. Love attaches children to moral conventions and arouses essential moral emotions like sympathy and guilt. In a

preindustrial society, these moral habits are further reinforced by the tribe or the village,

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as well as by religious institutions and folk tales. The developing child is surrounded by a kind of conspiracy of moral teachers, demonstrating lessons of character by word and (less reliably) by deed.

Market economies weaken this cultural conspiracy in three powerful ways…

CONTINUED ONLINE.

*Kay S. Hymowitz is the William E. Simon Fellow at the Manhattan Institute and a contributing editor at* City Journal. *Her most recent book is* Marriage and Caste in America: Separate and Unequal Families in a Post-Marital Age.

# No! And, well, yes.

**At America's birth, most societies were organized on the foundation of either a** landholding aristocracy or a strong military establishment. The American founders rejected these models and argued strenuously that a new society, built upon free commerce, would both engender a higher set of virtues and prove safer for, and more committed to, the rule of law. Such a society would be dedicated not to the pursuit of power but to the creation of plenty. As Alexander Hamilton noted in *Federalist* #12: "The prosperity of commerce is now perceived and acknowledged by all enlightened statesmen to be the most useful as well as the most productive source of national wealth, and has accordingly become a primary object of their political cares." Commerce would distract men from previous sources of division and faction. Their passions would turn from political causes to market activity, and the spirit of cooperation necessary for free markets would gradually attach their loyalties to the larger republic.

A commercial society also would be far, far better for the poor, and it would have a beneficent effect on public and personal morality. Through their careful study of history, the founders had learned that a society rooted in

military power tended to become touchy and erratic—too quick to fight wars of injured pride—at great and repetitive expense to the poor…

CONTINUED ONLINE.

*Michael Novak is the George Frederick Jewett Scholar in Religion, Philosophy, and Public Policy at the American Enterprise Institute. His more than twenty-five books include* The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism *and, most recently,* No One Sees God.

# It depends.

**Free markets corrode some aspects of character while enhancing others. Whether** the result is good, on balance, depends on how one envisions a good life. Much also depends on whether one believes other economic systems can do better. The question can only be answered by comparing realistic alternatives and by understanding how different systems promote divergent types of human character.

It is important to avoid thinking in terms of ideal models. In recent years there has been a tendency to think that free markets emerge spontaneously when state interference in the economy is removed. But free markets are not simply the absence of government. Markets

depend on systems of law to decide what can be traded as a commodity and what cannot. Slavery is forbidden in modern market economies; so are blackmail and child pornography. Free markets *always* involve some moral constraints of this sort, which are policed by governments. More generally, free markets rely on property rights, which are also enforced—and often created—by government.

The free market as it existed in mid-Victorian England came about not because the state withdrew from the economy, but rather because state power was used to privatize land that had been under various forms of common ownership, or not owned at all. The laissez-faire economy that existed for a few decades in 19th-century England was made possible by the Enclosure Acts…

CONTINUED ONLINE.

*John Gray is emeritus professor at the London School of Economics. Among his recent books are* False Dawn: The Delusions of Global Capitalism *(Granta) and* Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia *(Penguin).*

# Of course it does.

**Competition in the market puts people under great pressure to break the ordinary** rules of decent conduct and then to produce good reasons for doing so. It is these rationalizations—the endless self-deception necessary to meet the bottom line and still feel okay about it—that corrode moral character. But this isn't in itself an argument against the free market. Think about the ways that democratic politics also corrodes moral character. Competition for political power puts people under great pressure—to shout lies at public meetings, to make promises they can't keep, to take money from shady characters, to compromise principles that shouldn't be

compromised. All this has to be defended somehow, and moral character doesn't survive the defense—at least, it doesn't survive intact. But these obvious flaws don't constitute an argument against democracy.

To be sure, economic and political competition also produce cooperative projects of many different sorts—partnerships, companies, parties, unions…

CONTINUED ONLINE.

*Michael Walzer is professor emeritus in the School of Social Science at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey. He is a contributing editor of the* New Republic, *co-editor of* Dissent, *and the author, most recently, of* Thinking Politically.

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refining their data, which is why the polling establishment still looks askance at automated calling. One major textbook in the field brands robo-calling as Computerized Response Automated Polls—or CRAP. Leve says an academic once called SurveyUSA "the McDonald's of polling." When Leve turns up at AAPOR's annual conferences, his presentations in defense of his method are met with eye-rolling. "Some of the folks at AAPOR can't stand him," says Mark Blumenthal, who says he generally admires Leve's work.

Leve, for his part, can be withering about the establishment that rejects him. He bridles at the commonly used term "robo-calling" as a label for what he does. "It could not be a more offensive term," he says. "It literally is like using the N-word." He prefers the phrase "recorded-voice polling." He can also give as good as he gets: In one 2005 interview, for instance, Leve recounted a 1998 call from one of those snooty old polling firms asking his opinion of then–New York Jets head coach Bill Parcells. "Why would an interviewer want to know if I thought Bill Parcells was honest?" Leve wondered. It turned out that the operator was botching the name of New Jersey Representative Bill Pascrell, then running for reelection in Leve's district. "How many times a day do you think something like that happens with headset operators?" Leve asked. "How many different ways can you think of for an eight-dollar-an-hour employee doing monotonous work to make a mistake? Does it matter how many Ph.D.s worked to draw the sample for that survey? . . . It doesn't. The data was worthless."

But attacking Leve is a fruitless exercise these days. Whereas he may once have been ahead of the pack in the early '90s, now he is in the thick of the pack. A slew of new pollsters have emerged in recent years that follow Leve's example of defying the establishment with untrained, instantaneous, and methodologically unorthodox work. And, this election cycle, they make the original debate over recorded-voice calling seem quaint.

SHOCK POLL—blared a *Drudge Report* headline on December 26, 2007, just one week before the Iowa caucus. At a time when most pollsters were showing a dead heat in Iowa, this new survey found Hillary Clinton with a 15-point lead over Barack Obama. But the only shock, as it turned out, was that someone could have gotten it so wrong: Obama would beat Clinton in Iowa by eight points. The offender was the New Hampshire–based American Research Group. ARG is a black sheep of the polling world; I repeatedly heard it singled out for scorn by other pollsters. They complain that it releases little information about its sponsors and its methodology—for a time, there was even confusion about whether ARG relied on automated surveys or human operators. "ARG is a mystery," Leve says. "They release almost nothing about what they do. It's possible they don't even make phone calls." ("There's plenty of disclosure," says ARG's Dick Bennett. "I guess people are into trashing.")

It's not only ARG. These days, upstarts with authoritative sounding names like Insider Advantage and Strategic Vision crank out polls that many of the old hands consider suspect. The button-down polling mandarins like those based in AAPOR's Lenexa, Kansas, offices have lost their grip. Nancy Mathiowetz, the former president of AAPOR, laments that many new polling firms nowadays fail to meet the association's formal code of ethics—specifically by refusing to release the exact wording of their polls, which can easily skew results, and the sponsors behind the surveys.

The glut of new polls—and vast spectrum of quality—has created a Darwinian environment in which pollsters and watchdogs attack one another with nerdy ferocity. (One pollster described a firm he considers disreputable to me as "a street gang with a calculator.") Mark Blumenthal and his colleagues at *Pollster.com* routinely flag suspect polls, calling out their authors when they don't disclose crucial information like the wording of their questions and their demographic weighting. Before the Iowa caucus, for instance, Blumenthal challenged pollsters to explain how they were screening for "likely voters" in that unusual contest; five pollsters refused to respond and others grudgingly provided incomplete answers—a fact Blumenthal publicized in an angry *New York Times* op-ed column.

Another influential arbiter is Nate Silver, a 30-year-old baseball statistician who has made a name for himself and his blog, *FiveThirtyEight.com*, by transferring his formidable number-crunching talents to political polling. On October 2, Silver (who also blogs for THE NEW REPUBLIC) wrote a harsh online critique of *RealClearPolitics*. RCP's signature innovation is its practice of averaging campaign polls into one handy, pseudo-scientific figure which pundits from Karl Rove to Chris Matthews cite as gospel. Silver was outraged to find that RCP had recently begun including a conservative-tilting poll in its averages, while excluding another poll that has typically favored Obama. "Their partisan leaning is infused into their numbers," Silver wrote, accusing the site's editors of "cherry-picking those results that [are] to its liking, then coming up with post-facto rationalizations to justify its decisions." After a "contentious" call from an RCP editor, Silver withdrew his charge of bias, but still grouses that the site has no clear set of standards to explain its decisions. (Silver has also tangled with ARG, challenging the firm to an accuracy contest with a prize of $1,000 per state. ARG's Bennett recently fired back in *New York* magazine by likening Silver's work to palm-reading.)

In fact, almost anyone with an Internet connection and an interest in crosstabs can become an ombudsman—much like Alan Abramowitz, a political science professor at Emory University. After the longtime Democratic pollster Celinda Lake co-produced national polling numbers showing surprising weakness for Obama earlier this month, for instance, Abramowitz sent Lake a tart e-mail, blind cc'd to several other recipients, demanding to see her raw data. Unappeased, he followed up a few days later: "Celinda—do you believe your own poll?" During this campaign, Abramowitz has badgered several other major pollsters this way, all for the benefit of the fellow academics and journalists he copies on his e-mails.

Sometimes it seems that pollsters spend nearly as much time arguing with their critics as they do actually gathering data. As a result, pollsters face the same fate as other traditional voices of political authority—not least the mainstream media. The more they bash one another in the public eye, the less the public trusts the objectivity of their work.

"PLEASE BE ADVISED that you have been placed on our list of phony pollsters," read an e-mail Jay Leve received earlier this month. "These are Republican controlled pollsters who put out biased, slanted polls. Our list is sent to over 1,650,000 subscribers and media outlets. Congratulations!" The e-mail was sent under a clearly bogus name from a non-existent domain—obviously just the minor harassment of

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an aggrieved Obama supporter. But it is typical of the dozens of angry e-mails Leve gets every week, from both the right and the left. "Why is your garbage data so different from everyone elses [sic] putting McCain ahead of Obama???" reads another stink bomb, sent just two days later.

Partisans on the Web have created an unprecedented demand for more empirical data about the presidential campaign. And yet, when that data doesn't comport with their beliefs, they are quick to attack it. This attitude extends not just to the data itself but also to the collection of it. Leve says he was bombarded with angry mail when he stopped polling Hillary Clinton as a possible Obama running mate. Likewise, just after McCain named Sarah Palin as his running mate, the pollster Scott Rasmussen tested voters' head-to-head preferences between Palin and Hillary Clinton. The survey showed voters preferred Clinton, 52–41, and Rasmussen got "tons of mail" from Palin supporters who accused him of conducting the poll prior to her Republican convention speech in a sinister effort to measure her standing before she could strut her stuff onstage. To be a pollster is to expect this sort of abuse. "I've had people call me at home," sighs the longtime pollster Andrew Kohut.

Indeed it seems that everyone is a polling expert nowadays. "Don't trust Zogby," declared one online commenter back in August. This shot at a survey conducted by John Zogby, a marquee name in polling, didn't appear on, say, the *Huffington Post* or the website of *National Review*, but on *Wild West Sports*—a crude message board whose users post opinions on college football, pro basketball, and, it seems, the merits of polling professionals.

It's actually not irrational for partisans to get so exercised over polls. More than providing a cheap thrill, poll numbers drive conventional wisdom and fundraising, which, in a Heisenberg Principle effect, can become a campaign's reality. "We seem to have become a nation of political junkies, and clearly the donor class has access to and pays attention to these public polls," says the veteran Democratic strategist Jim Jordan. "And they exert pressure and complain and worry and prematurely celebrate based on these things. The campaign decision-makers simply have to tune it all out."

But that's more easily said than done. (Jordan himself called me back a day later raging at Rasmussen's new GOP-friendly findings in two Senate races.) Clinton's sustained lead in national polling last fall had Obama backers in a state of high alarm, even though his campaign staff knew that the race would depend on his showing in Iowa, where he was always poised for a win. "The abundance of polling—and the daily tracking polls in particular—have been the worst thing to happen to political journalism in twenty years," grouses Obama communications director Dan Pfeiffer.

Similarly, the Obama team fended off another wave of Democratic panic after Palin gave McCain a late summer polling surge that Obama aides privately believed to be temporary. Their irritation was evident in a September 8 meeting between Obama campaign manager David Plouffe and campaign reporters. Plouffe complained of press "hyperventilating" about recent polls, and, when asked by a *Washington Post* reporter about a poll his paper conducted showing a huge swing of white female voters to McCain, Plouffe tersely snapped, "Your poll is wrong." Likewise, when the McCain team didn't like a September *Post* poll that caused a stir by showing McCain nine points behind Obama, they convened a press call with their house pollster, Bill McInturff, to undermine the poll's findings.

In short, no one trusts anyone else's polls anymore. So it was perhaps fitting when a new national tracking poll joined the already-crowded scrum of such surveys this summer. This poll was sponsored not by a cable network or national newspaper, as most are—but rather by that mother ship of liberal blogs, *Daily Kos*. The poll, conducted by the Maryland-based firm Research 2000, purports to be just like any other: "It's not a liberal poll or a conservative poll, it's a poll," the website announced last month. As chance would have it, however, the *Kos* poll makes very optimistic assumptions about African American and Hispanic voter turnout. Thus, it has routinely showed Barack Obama further ahead of John McCain than most other surveys. The moral of the story seems to be that, if existing polls don't reflect the world as you would like to see it, you can always just commission your own.

Many pollsters insist that the way to restore public confidence in their profession is to re-impose methodological standards, which treat polling as a social science rather than an amateur's pursuit. But the problem is that, despite the meticulous nature of Gallup and Pew—and the quicker, less orthodox approach of Leve and some other newcomers to the field—the establishment firms don't necessarily have all the answers. Jay Leve, as it turns out, actually has a very strong track record. In March, Nate Silver ranked SurveyUSA as the most accurate of 18 major national firms, ahead of more venerable outfits like Gallup and CNN's pollster, Opinion Research.

Leve's winning track record may be the result of the technology he uses; automated polling allows him to tap into a larger pool of voters at a faster rate than live human polling—offering an instant snapshot rather than results blurred by time, as with a slow camera shutter. But Leve's technique is subject to some of the same criticisms as traditional polling. For example, some phone surveys are missing young voters with cell phones but not land lines. Overall, response rates have been declining for years. And, this season, race and gender have added tricky new variables. In short, Leve's success is hard to explain—affirming a postmodern sense that methodology no longer ensures accuracy more than instinct and dumb luck.

The irony is that this perception, one that critics use to deride polling, is now widespread even among pollsters themselves. Last January, after all the big pollsters failed to predict Clinton's stunning New Hampshire primary victory, AAPOR asked them to hand over their raw data for evaluation. Leve complied immediately but says others dragged their feet. "That report has never come out," he says with a shake of his head. Mathiowetz, the former AAPOR president, says the report is coming soon. But, she says, a wider lack of transparency is a sign of changing times. It wasn't just the *Chicago Tribune* that blew the 1948 Truman-Dewey presidential election call—it was the entire polling establishment. Afterward, a panel of public opinion professionals studied what went wrong. Almost every major polling firm cooperated and submitted data about their research. The thought of this lost era clearly moves Mathiowetz: "What a lovely . . ." she says, trailing off. "It just kind of brings tears to my eyes."

Leve has none of this sentimentality for his own industry. In fact, he can be downright dismissive of our national obsession with polling. When a surprising number appears in the news, he says, he often fields calls from his excitable mother. "I pick up the phone and she says, 'Hey, I just heard—McCain's now in front!' I say, 'Mom, ignore it!' I often tell people to pay no attention whatsoever. There are an awful lot of numbers coming out that mean absolutely nothing." ◆



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## Stanley Kauffmann on Films

# DEPARTURE, ARRIVALS

Three kinds of performers appear in films: actors, stars, and star actors. Some very good actors lack the looks and personality to become stars. Some stars, iconic though they may be, have just enough talent to get by. Then there are the actors who have both talent and charisma. No American was ever more indisputably a star actor than Paul Newman.

Newman's death on September 26, like the deaths of all those who have mattered to us, brought memories—keeps bringing them. The first time I saw him was on Broadway in 1953. The play, William Inge's *Picnic*, was about a freewheeling vagabond who hits a small town and interferes between a girl and her well-behaved suitor. I found the suitor, played by Newman, much more interesting than the supposed hero. The last time I saw him on stage was in Tennessee Williams's *Sweet Bird of Youth* in 1959, when, already a screen figure, he scintillated as an older woman's lover. (The film version preserved his performance.)

Newman's move to films transformed him from a valuable actor into a different order of being. In his first moments on screen, which were in a biblical disaster called *The Silver Chalice* (1954), he seemed almost incredible—a paradigm created magically to exemplify the very idea of the star actor. It was hard to believe that anyone actually had been born so attractive and with so much talent. But soon he became familiar, even necessary. As film followed film, he became a kind of companion. In his earlier days Newman was dogged by comparisons with Marlon Brando, who was rising at about the same time, but their two careers and personalities separated so widely that the linkage soon came to seem silly.

To list all of Newman's noteworthy films, out of his sixty-five or so, would be pleasant but indulgent. Much has recently been said, justly, about his appeal, through a humanity that made even the selfish Hud someone we understood while we clucked. Instead, I join those who emphasize his range. Remember the pug in *Somebody Up There Likes Me*, the blithe bandit in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, the white man raised by Apaches in *Hombre*, the aging fatalistic crime boss in *Road to Perdition*. But the one role that seems to sum up all he could achieve, and without vanity of achievement, is the alcoholic lawyer in *The Verdict*. Anyone looking for the quintessence of American film acting can find no finer instance than Newman in that picture. I have seen it five or six times, and now, in grateful obeisance, I want to see it again.

*PAUL NEWMAN*

***STRANDED: I'VE COME FROM A PLANE THAT CRASHED ON THE MOUNTAINS***
*Zeitgeist Films*

***LET THE RIGHT ONE IN***
*Magnet Releasing*

On October 13, 1972, a plane from Uruguay went down in the snowy Andes. On board were forty-five people, including a rugby team, with relatives and friends, bound for a game in Chile. Once the plane was reported missing, helicopter searches began but failed. Days passed. Hope of rescue waned. Seventy-two days later, two survivors of the crash who had struggled across the fearsome mountains finally found a shepherd. Sixteen survivors were rescued.

This story, of the crash and survival and the trek across the mountains, has already been the subject of films. One was made in Mexico; another one, called *Alive* (1993), which starred Ethan Hawke, was American. Both films were unseen by me, but however good they may have been, I didn't regret it while watching *Stranded: I've Come From a Plane That Crashed on the Mountains*, a documentary by the Uruguayan director Gonzalo Arijón. In 2006 Arijón took some (now white-haired) survivors and their children back to the scene of the crash. Carefully deploying their comments, the sure-handed Arijón fashioned a disquietingly gripping film. Visually, *Stranded* is composed of some shots actually made there in 1972, along with obviously recreated shots (cigarettes being lighted, feet moving through the snow, a meeting with the old shepherd). Like other documentary directors before him, Arijón assumes that we will know which moments were re-enacted and why they were needed.

The details of the crash are as stark as we would expect. Just one example. A young woman was pinned in the wreckage, and her brother tells us thirty-four years later how he held her in his arms for two days while she bled to death. Most of the drama, naturally, is not in the dead but in the living. They expected to be rescued and gradually saw that expectation fade. They didn't even hear the helicopters that were searching for them. They ate the odd things that were in the plane; then they ate even odder things—hair oil, cosmetics, anything that could be swallowed. Then they faced the looming, increasingly dreadful question. They were surrounded by bodies, frozen bodies.

To read about what followed or to see it played by actors would be grim

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enough. But to hear about it from the aging survivors themselves, all men who are clearly civilized human beings, is disturbing in an unexpected way. We look at people who ate people—bits of bodies anyway—and we feel stripped of a veneer. All moral dilemmas are inevitably weighed against our judgment of what we ourselves would have done. No one wants to be asked the question that this film implicitly asks, yet facing the question is strangely salutary. We are a bit less fraudulently sure of ourselves afterward.

For these particular men, the foundation of their behavior in this crisis was their religion. They are all devout Catholics. (The rugby team was sponsored by a Catholic group.) As they incised—as minimally as possible—the bodies of men and women whom they had known, they remembered the transubstantiation of bread and wine in their faith. They convinced themselves that what they were forced to eat had somehow similarly been transmuted; that heaven itself had made their survival possible, had ordained it. In any case, those of us who cannot share their religious assurance can still be glad that these men found it. (The group of sixteen survivors, increased by wives and children, has since grown to a group of one hundred.)

Any account of the courage and determination of these men, especially those who climbed and slid and climbed for days until they found that shepherd, would be stunning enough. It is all the more overwhelming when we hear the story from the survivors themselves, men who look like not some super race, but just people we might know. None of us, it seems fairly safe to say, will ever be in a situation like the one that they endured. But they are not a different race: we are their kin. It is somewhat astonishing to be reminded that elements of these men, who did what they were willing to do in order to survive, reside within our modish, brightly bantering selves.

Which leads to a tenuously connected subject. Are there many people in the twenty-first century who believe in vampires? Obviously there are millions who enjoy vampire novels and films, but that doesn't necessarily mean belief. We can love *A Midsummer Night's Dream* without believing in fairies. The huge public pleasure in vampire fictions has doubtless been analyzed by sociologists and psychologists as one aspect of the hunger for horror stories, and I suppose it involves thoughts about mortality and sex. But, old grandfather *Dracula* included, it is hard to remember any work about vampires that could, in itself, be taken as more than *frisson* fiction.

The matter comes up because of a Swedish film called *Let the Right One In*, which is based on a novel by John Ajvide Lindqvist that has been published in twelve countries besides Sweden. The picture was directed by Tomas Alfredson, experienced in television and film, who has lately been chosen to direct at the Royal Dramatic Theater in Stockholm, Ingmar Bergman's old temple. The connection with Bergman fits further because, despite its subject, Alfredson's spare suggestive compositions in the film convey his regard for Bergman. Further: the production design by Eva Norén would not have disappointed Bergman, nor would the cinematography by Hoyte van Hoytema, which is already hung with festival prizes. The cast, including the two twelve-year-olds in the leading roles, are impressively competent. All these factors only make the picture more puzzling.

When we see a rampantly commercial film made by people who we know are capable of better work, we understand that livings must be made, lives must be occupied, places in the scheme of things must be maintained. But *Let the Right One In* begins like a truly serious picture, a possible addition to the Swedish film treasury. (Sweden was one of the

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first countries where film was sometimes treated as more than entertainment.) More: this film continues seriously, in structure, look, tone. Nonetheless, it is a vampire story. We are forced to assume not that all these gifted people were just making a living, but that they believed in this picture. (Indeed, the central vampire elements wind through sequences that, in gravity and temper, seem to belong in another film.) That is the puzzle.

The screenplay, adapted by Lindqvist from his novel, begins with Oskar, a schoolboy in a Stockholm suburb, who has a schoolboy's troubles: bigger boys bully him. In the courtyard of the apartment project where he lives, he meets a newcomer girl named Eli, and, rather diffidently, they become friends. One day Oskar is playing with a Rubik's cube, which he lends to her. She understands it very quickly. In time Oskar asks if she will be his girlfriend, and though she is apparently fond of him, she tells him that she is not a girl. Transvestism flares in our heads, but soon enough we learn what she meant. This twelve-year-old, which at least is what she seems, is a vampire.

Blood, her diet, recurs throughout, like inserted splotches in a film about a schoolboy's troubles. The blood and the troubles meet in a finish that lifts commonplace childhood matters far up into the supernatural. Nothing is ever explained. That appears to be part of the point. If the picture has a theme, it might be that the inexplicable can burst into the midst of dailiness. Still, any puzzling about the why and wherefore of this picture cannot dim admiration for Alfredson's directing, especially of the two excellent youngsters, Kåre Hedebrant and Lina Leandersson. I wonder what Kåre and Lina dreamed about at night during the months of shooting. ◆

## Jed Perl on Art

# HALF TAME

The time has come to take a fresh look at the achievement of Roger Shattuck, who died in 2005 at the age of eighty-two. From his first book, *The Banquet Years*, published exactly half a century ago, to his last major work, *Forbidden Knowledge*, Shattuck was one of America's most adventuresome students of modernity, at once a celebrant of some of the wildest reaches of artistic experiment and a critic of the twentieth century's dream of unlimited, ever-expanding horizons. In *The Banquet Years*, he saluted a quartet of fiercely independent, indomitably idiosyncratic figures—Henri Rousseau, Erik Satie, Alfred Jarry, Guillaume Apollinaire—and brought a rapturous, almost cinematic eye to his evocations of the social exhilaration of fin-de-siècle Paris. In *Forbidden Knowledge*, a book composed in a beautifully dry and even laconic manner, he wondered if there are dimensions of experience, whether scientific or sexual or moral, that modern men and women, for all their overwhelming desire, cannot usefully absorb.

Shattuck combined the impishness of a trickster with the stringencies of a moralist. He was a Yankee skeptic with a taste for French hedonism. If his books, though often published to considerable acclaim, have rarely been seen as presenting a consistent vision, it may be because he continually eluded the theoretical litmus tests and tried-and-true scholarly approaches by which intellectuals tend to feel constrained. The author of three books about Proust also wrote *The Forbidden Experiment*, a study of a child who was discovered living without human contact in the woods in southern France in 1800, and whose story had already become the subject of Truffaut's movie *The Wild Child*. In his later years Shattuck became deeply troubled by what he believed was the lack of a strong curriculum in America's public schools, and was elected to a school board in Vermont, and published on the subject of education. One of his last projects was a new edition of Helen Keller's *The Story of My Life*, a best-selling account of the against-all-odds triumph of this woman who had become blind and deaf at nineteen months. Keller's memoir, generally regarded as a good old-fashioned celebration of American moral determination, was not a book that many people would have expected to hold the interest of one of America's most enthusiastic students of art-for-art's-sake and absurdism.

Shattuck always followed his curiosity, his instincts, his hunches. The subtitle of his last book about Proust, which brought together many of his earlier writings on the novelist, was "A Field Guide to *In Search of Lost Time*." Shattuck liked the idea of a field guide, a book that supplied a non-professional with all the information necessary to master a fascinating subject, whether birds or mushrooms or a great French novel. He explored quite a few different fields of knowledge. Before writing about Satie, he studied music with Nadia Boulanger in Paris. Although not trained in developmental psychology or in theories about the care of the blind and the deaf, he gained a solid grasp of these subjects in order to prepare for his work on the wild child of *The Forbidden Experiment* and on Helen Keller. To the end Shattuck retained some of the quality of an autodidact, and it hardly seemed to make a difference that he had been a member of the Society of Fellows at Harvard and taught at the University of Texas at Austin, the University of Virginia, and Boston University. Perhaps not surprisingly, he had started out with ambitions to be a novelist, and he never entirely gave up on fiction. A volume of poems, *Half Tame*, was published in 1964, and near the close of his life he was looking for a publisher for a second collection of verse. One feels that to the end Shattuck was wondering what kind of a writer he ought to be.

Taken together, Shattuck's work composes a field guide to the modern imagination—an imagination that, for better and for worse, continually questions its own nature, what is inherent and what is learned. Few students of modernity have roamed as widely as Shattuck, offering penetrating analyses not only of literature but of the visual arts and music as well. As an admirer of modern works ranging from the oceanic intricacies of Proust's novel to the sly asceticisms of Satie's piano compositions, Shattuck is fascinated by the freshness and the variety of forms that the human imagination dreams up. Yet avant-gardism carries Shattuck back to the demands of tradition, which for him is not a canonical arrangement of masterworks so much as a cluster of ideas about how culture enables us to understand the world. To compose a classically logical paragraph is one way of understanding the world—and to break up that paragraph, to write episodically or with collage-like juxtapositions, is another.

It is while writing about Apollinaire's poetry in *The Banquet Years* that Shattuck announces his abiding theme: the never-ending struggle that Apollinaire calls "that long quarrel between Order and Adventure." For Shattuck, order and adventure are at once human principles



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and artistic principles—the values that a person ought to live by and the formal principles that artists shape to meet their needs. Unlike most critics and thinkers, who tend to be more strongly drawn to one value or the other, Shattuck believes, with Apollinaire before him, that there is no final resolution, and that the quarrel itself, if truly and honestly pursued, can teach us a great deal—even everything we need to know. What sets Shattuck apart from most students of the outer reaches of artistic invention is his conviction that such experiments must always be tested against some core of habit or perception. Artistic experiment becomes, in this sense, an extension of the larger experiment of being a person who lives a full life. The more I read Shattuck, the more impressed I am by his rejection of any particular ideology of aesthetic experience, whether conservative or revolutionary. Artistic expression, in his view, provides a range of forms through which artists convey their experience of the world, and without such forms we are blind and mute, locked in the marble prison that was said to have been Helen Keller's fate before the extraordinary Anne Sullivan became her teacher.

For Shattuck, the artist who comes closest to resolving the quarrel between order and adventure is Proust. He refers to *In Search of Lost Time* as "this ultimate monument to the artistic vocation," the work of a man who is absolutely alive to the unpredictability and variability of life *and* to the ordering possibilities of art. What Shattuck loves about Proust is that for him nothing is one way. The *Search* is at once a dazzling celebration of quotidian experience, animated by life in all its variegated aspects, and a formal experiment of the most extreme and relentlessly singular kind, in its own way as strange as a poem by Mallarmé. What Proust asks, according to Shattuck, is "how much of one's multitudinous self can a person reveal or embody at one time? The first answer is plain common sense: it all depends. It depends on many things, from chance and volition to memory and forgetting. The second answer is categorical. No matter how we go about it, *we cannot be all of ourselves all at once*." So it is no surprise that "the scope of action and reflection encountered in the *Search* exceeds the capacity of one mind to hold it all together at one time." The book must embrace many forms of order—and for Shattuck, who is by nature a pluralist, this is at the heart of its greatness. Proust becomes "the portraitist of an expiring society, the artist of romantic reminiscence, the narrator of the laminated 'I,' the classicist of formal structure—all these figures have been found in Proust.... All are present as discernible components of his vision and his creation." The work of art as a formal invention must keep shifting and transmogrifying so as to respond to the changing nature of experience. And the process does not end even when the work of art is completed, for the greatest works, as Shattuck observes at the end of *Proust's Way*, affect readers in different ways at different points in their lives.

Shattuck's refusal to see the work of art as existing in splendid isolation does not mean that he is any less attentive to its freestanding value. The fascination of his standpoint is that he eludes the pieties of both formalism and anti-formalism. For Shattuck, works of literature and art are fixed points in a fluid universe, products of experience that stand apart from experience, which we see in different ways, depending on our own circumstances. In *The Banquet Years*, his interest is in how extreme ways of living can provoke extreme forms of artistic expression, and each of his four cases is peculiar for different reasons. Henri Rousseau is perhaps the strangest of all: a man with scattershot academic training who began as a Sunday painter and pushed his own style, with its smoothly finished surfaces and powerfully stylized animal and vegetal forms, into paintings of luscious jungles and twilit deserts and dreamy Parisian suburbs that have the capacity, like certain dreams, to be simultaneously disquieting and consoling. The paintings, Shattuck observes, have a coherence that "can be regarded as the all-absorbing presence of Nature, or, better, as the singleness of Rousseau's internal eye." And the particular poetry of the paintings, so Shattuck wants us to understand, is somehow an emanation of the man, about whom a close friend later observed that "Rousseau always remained an enigma for me. Was he a man mystified by everything, or was there something of the mystifier in him?"

As we follow the protagonists of *The Banquet Years*, we can see that for Shattuck each of their fiercely idiosyncratic lives becomes the staging ground for the alternative reality that is a work of art. Of Satie, Shattuck writes: "Greatness was not a quality Satie valued, and he was not a 'great' musician. For being singular, for being humble and joyous and wise, both man and work are unforgettable." As for


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Alfred Jarry, who was thirty-four when he died in 1907, his life and legend centered around the character of Père Ubu, an obese and wildly scatological figure who first appeared on the stage in *Ubu Roi* in December 1896, a performance so scandalous that it was not repeated until after Jarry's death. Jarry, a willfully stylized and eccentric personality, regarded his life in Paris as every bit as much of a Rabelaisian act as Ubu's appearances on the printed page. Shattuck likes the comic dimension of Jarry, the side that produced volcanic, manic figures, human beings who are little more than primitive marionettes. And he admires 'Pataphysics, the absurdist science that Jarry dreamed up—the study of "the laws which govern exceptions," which would interest Shattuck for much of his life. "He lived a contortion," Shattuck writes, "and twisted himself inside out. His soul was, after all, an assemblage of tics." Shattuck is not indifferent to Jarry's belief that "anything can be its opposite," although he will also admit that "Jarry frequently becomes inaccessible. That is to be expected. The true source of astonishment is that the apparently disparate elements of his career should finally mesh. His biography, his legend, and his literary work are so organically combined that, strange to say, no sustained effort to isolate one from another aids in explaining him." For Shattuck, Jarry may have had some of the dark fascination of a doppelgänger, pointing toward a fusion of art and life so total that it shatters all the recognizable categories, moving ineluctably toward obscurantism if not downright incoherence.

For readers who were provoked by *The Banquet Years*, Shattuck emerged in the 1960s as an avatar of bohemianism and the avant-garde. In a powerful early chapter, "Four Men: Four Traits," he celebrated "the childlike and absurd, dream and ambiguity," as the keys not only to these four men but also to the new century—the century that would shortly give birth to Dadaism and Surrealism, "surrealism" being a term coined by Apollinaire. But even in *The Banquet Years*, a young man's book published when Shattuck was in his mid-thirties, there is a tempered edge to the analysis, a sense of the limits of the very traits he has set out to celebrate. Writing of Apollinaire, Shattuck compares him to "a surfboard rider who balances in easy triumph on the crest of a wave," and observes that in a time when great ideas came less easily or were institutionalized or were conventionalized he would not have seemed so much in control—"he would sink in a flat sea." While Shattuck admires Apollinaire's "flexible sensibility," he does not imagine that the power of such a sensibility is unlimited. And if he recognizes that "the childlike and absurd, dream and ambiguity are means of reaching inside ourselves to extract what education and society have buried," he is under no illusions as to where we would be without "education and society." The heroes of *The Banquet Years* are not naïve, not by any means. If they reject sophistication, their acts are the acts of sophisticated men.

After the publication of *The Banquet Years*, Shattuck might have been expected to follow the story of modern experimentation deeper into the twentieth century, and by his own account he did work on "an unfinished book on Dada and Surrealism," parts of which were later gathered in an essay collection called *The Innocent Eye*. He certainly never lost his avidity for experimental art. *The Innocent Eye* includes a forceful defense of one of Apollinaire's most vehemently unconventional works, the picture poem "Ocean-Letter." Shattuck freely admits to having treated this work "in cavalier fashion" earlier in his career, dismissing as unreadable Apollinaire's words arranged in circles and rays, but now the poem strikes him as bearing comparison to Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon* and Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*. Shattuck's last essay collection, *Candor and Perversion*, includes a spirited celebration of Arp, the artist who began as a Dadaist and turned into something of a classicist, and whose art and life he describes as a felicitous fairy tale, "forever new, and forever the same," at once "alive" and "old-fashioned."

If Shattuck left his investigations of Dada and Surrealism unfinished, it was because he knew that he needed a wider canvas on which to explore the relationship between order and adventure. In this context, it is fascinating to turn from *The Banquet Years* to *The Forbidden Experiment*, the study of the wild child discovered in southern France in 1800. For if *The Banquet Years* focuses on men such as Jarry, Apollinaire, and Satie, who were rebelling against their training, *The Forbidden Experiment* explores the extent to which we must be trained to become expressive human beings. The case of the wild child of Aveyron, discovered at the age of eleven or twelve after living in the woods by himself for some period of years, electrified the educated classes in France, who were already immersed in Enlightenment ideas about man's natural state. The boy was taken to Paris, where he eventually came under the guidance of a medical student named Jean-Marc Gaspard Itard. For a time Itard dedicated all of his energies to teaching the boy, now named Victor, the rudiments of language. He wanted Victor to be able to communicate with others and live in society. But Victor's progress was never as great as Itard had hoped it might be. The book is a tragedy, the story of a young man who cannot become fully human. Shattuck leaves us with the conviction that the ability to think deep thoughts, to communicate, to love—the capacities that we regard as fundamental to our nature—are to some not inconsiderable degree acquired behavior. It turns out that there can be no human adventure without a very strong dose of human order, which suggests that those modernists who reveled in the rejection of tradition and convention were indeed playing with fire.

Shattuck's most sustained investigation of the significance of tradition and convention is in *Forbidden Knowledge: From Prometheus to Pornography*, published in 1996. I find it significant that the word "forbidden" appears in the title of two of Shattuck's essential books. For Shattuck, a fundamentally liberal spirit, liberal pieties may have been the forbidden realm, which he explored with a care and an intelligence very rare in our time. "Are there things we should *not* know?" Shattuck asks on the first page of *Forbidden Knowledge*. "Can anyone or any institution, in this culture of unfettered enterprise and growth, seriously propose limits on knowledge?" Shattuck does not even attempt to supply definitive answers to these questions. He prefers to proceed in a speculative spirit. He begins by underscoring the ancientness of these questions in Genesis and the Garden of Eden, in *Paradise Lost*, and in the various versions of the Faust legend. In part, *Forbidden Knowledge* is a work of literary criticism, with studies of Melville and Camus. Shattuck explores the question of whether there should ever be limits placed on scientific inquiry, discussing the development of the atomic bomb and the potential of DNA research to alter the makeup of human beings. He looks at the work of the Marquis de Sade, and examines the arguments as to whether sexual predators have been emboldened or inspired by reading such works. And he considers the work of literary artists who were sexually celibate or abstinent, especially Emily Dickinson, and reflects on her ability nevertheless to create works that penetrate to the deepest recesses of human feeling. The book does not quite come together, but perhaps that is the way Shattuck meant it to be. This is a study in


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which lines of inquiry are opened up, in which we are led in certain directions and encouraged to think further on our own.

*Forbidden Knowledge* might be said to be *The Banquet Years* turned inside out. In *The Banquet Years*, creativity depends on the rejection of conventions or limitations. In *Forbidden Knowledge*, the workings of the imagination are sometimes strengthened by the acceptance of those same restrictions. Dickinson emerges as almost the opposite of Apollinaire or Jarry. She is the writer who gains access to the unlimited uses of the imagination by accepting a straitened way of life. "Free of prudishness," Shattuck writes, "Dickinson's exultant abnegation contained a strong component of aestheticism. The pleasures she sought tended not toward paroxysm that overwhelms the mind but toward a heightened awareness that mediates between intensity and moderation." I do not think that Shattuck had any intention of choosing between Apollinaire and Dickinson; he recognized the power of both their positions. And although he has grave doubts about the value of De Sade's writings, he is clearly opposed to the censorship of literature. What worries him is the line of thinking that celebrates experimentation for its own sake, in science or in art. Experimentation to what end? Experimentation in relation to what? These are his insistent questions. "I suggest," he writes toward the close of *Forbidden Knowledge*, "that the lesson of the history of curiosity is one of pace and timing. Can we still control our own velocity? Our rate of change? Are we courting the fate of Icarus?" The question is whether we can sustain the headlong, exuberant spirit of experiment that was kicked off by the Banquet Years, and do so without allowing experimentation to degenerate into nihilism.

While there is surely an underlying unity to Shattuck's widely variegated thoughts, he was a man whose positions struck some people as shifting—and not always in the most productive direction. Scholars who, early in their careers in the 1970s, had looked to him as an apostle of the French avant-garde reacted with unease, if not dismay, when they heard him in the 1980s sounding off like an old-fashioned humanist or preaching against the perils of experimentation. Some might have been surprised that at Boston University, where he taught in the 1990s, this connoisseur of bohemianism helped to create a Great Books program. He was also an important figure in the Association of Literary Scholars and Critics, a organization created in 1994 as an alternative to the MLA, which has had the reputation of being neoconservative or reactionary in its outlook.

What Shattuck himself thought about all this we cannot know. He was a reticent man, and I imagine that he counted on his reticence to carry him through many a bumpy time. Shattuck had been an army pilot during World War II, and there was about him a physical aplomb that many will associate with the aviator's skills, a connection between the craft of flying and certain personal qualities that he himself acknowledged in an essay about the Wright Brothers that he published in *The New York Review of Books* toward the end of his life. You might not quite see how Shattuck could get from Erik Satie to Helen Keller, but somehow he proved that it could be done. With his elegantly etched features and trim athletic physique, he had the aura of a cool customer, and nobody without that kind of inner confidence could have kept his head after the success of *The Banquet Years*, a book which in the decade after its publication came to be associated with the yeasty, unpredictable, improvisational, anti-formalist side of the modern movement. *The Banquet Years* fit right in with a new mood that was overtaking American campuses and theaters and museums in the 1960s, and was reflected in the fast-growing enthusiasm for Duchamp, in the performances of the Living Theater, and in the essays collected in Susan Sontag's *Against Interpretation*. The art-collecting protagonist of B. H. Friedman's novel *Whispers*, published in 1972, picks up a copy of the paperback edition of *The Banquet Years* at LaGuardia Airport and reflects that the 1960s are the Banquet Years all over again, only new and improved.

Shattuck went to Yale before the war and was a junior fellow at Harvard in the 1950s. Those were the decades when the New Criticism was at the height of its influence, and if Shattuck never lost his feeling for the freestanding value of the work of art, the value upon which Eliot had most insisted, he could still see that art and life fed off each other, nourished each other. In some unpublished notes made in the early 1950s, when he was beginning work on *The Banquet Years*, Shattuck acknowledged that "the new critics have made their point and we will no longer with impunity walk from the text into the man." And yet he worried that "literature begins to become something of an orphan." He compared a work of art to "a fallen comet, come down blazing and wonderful," and he wanted to find a way to write about such works of art that "will serve to give us insight not merely into a work of art—a fallen, cold, heavy stone, awesome but dead—but into a human mind."

Where this thinking led Shattuck was toward a way of writing about art that could not do without the biographical dimension. His approach already had a strong tradition in the United States, in the work of Lewis Mumford, Van Wyck Brooks, and Edmund Wilson, and Wilson remained one of Shattuck's heroes throughout his life. Like Mumford and Wilson, Shattuck had a horror of specialization. He believed that a writer ought to be able to tackle any subject—whether a poem's structure or an author's love life—in the same direct and intuitive manner, using the same analytical tools. Like Mumford and Wilson, who took such pride in tackling difficult sociological or philosophical topics without any particular training in those disciplines, Shattuck was eager to plunge into questions of moral philosophy or medical ethics with nothing but his own gut sense to guide him. It is not surprising that Shattuck received an especially warm response among non-specialists, who valued the flexibility and the immediacy of his thought.

Shattuck was sometimes accused of backing away from aesthetic innovation as he grew older—an accusation, incidentally, that was also leveled against Wilson. In neither case was the accusation fair. At the end of his life Shattuck was writing about Pierre Michon, an innovative contemporary French writer with a strong following among the young. In Vermont he spent his tenure on a local school board pushing for a curriculum based on classic texts and a solid grounding in the fundamentals of Western culture. At the same time, he was collecting in his home all the curious, quirky, sometimes exuberantly anarchic publications of the Collège de 'Pataphysique, the French organization that celebrated Jarry's absurdist "science of imaginary solutions" and with which he had been involved for much of his life. *Forbidden Knowledge* might be said to tackle some of the themes that had interested the neoconservatives in the 1980s, especially the question of the centrality of convention to the creative act. Yet Shattuck always avoided the neoconservatives' biggest mistake, which was to deny the beguilements of experimentation.

Shattuck confronted, more honestly perhaps than any critic in our time, the paradoxes that are inherent in the freestanding integrity of the work of art. The formalists believe that art is a moral law



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unto itself, and this idea has turned out to have a polemical power for thinkers on the right and on the left. For neoconservatives, formalism is all too often a way of insulating art from the confusions of life, and this can lead to an art that is not only autonomous, but lacking in energy and point. On the cultural left, the formalist argument can become a way of boosting the salacious or nihilistic or polemical quality of a work of art, which is understood to be beyond the reach of criticism. In *Forbidden Knowledge*, Shattuck proposes a far more subtle approach to formal values: that although they do exist, they can never be entirely separated from other values—that, indeed, we would not want them to be. His argument is gradualist, exploratory, speculative in the best sense: profoundly liberal.

I FIND IT SIGNIFICANT that the book of poems Shattuck published in the 1960s is titled *Half Tame*. Shattuck takes his poetry very seriously. And when, in the concluding poem, he confesses that it is the poet himself who is "half tame," he comes as close as he ever will to defining his own place in the argument between order and adventure. The work in question, "Nora's Poem," is an offering to the poet's wife, who had danced with the Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo in the 1940s and to whom Shattuck was married for some fifty years:

I do a wicked lindy when I'm drunk
sober
I limp like a crippled lobster
so I fell yes fell for a dancer
to spite my feet and spoil my pride
and the rest came tumbling
after

Otherwise
I'm normal
half tame
to see me
you might even think I was easy
to live with

The poet sees himself as a man of contradictions who struggles to reconcile his contradictions, as a man who, like most "normal" people, is "half tame." And the critic sees art in the same light. Nobody would want an art that was entirely tame. Then again, most of us would not want an art that was entirely wild. But how wild is wild enough? And how tame is tame enough? These are the questions that Roger Shattuck never stopped asking. They are the questions that true lovers of art and literature and music and theater ask every day of their lives. ◆

Peter N. Miller

# THE MORNING OR THE NIGHT

**GIORDANO BRUNO: PHILOSOPHER/HERETIC**
By Ingrid D. Rowland
(Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 352 pp., $29)

I.

"TO PHILOSOPHIZE is to learn to die": seven words, and an epoch in Western thought. According to Plato in the *Phaedo*, one of the inextinguishable monuments that he erected to his martyred teacher, Socrates believed that philosophy was a way of "practicing dying." Cicero, who set himself the task of making philosophy speak Latin, translated "practice" not with *meditatio* but *commentatio*—meaning "careful preparation," from which we get our own "commentary" or "study." Study, he implies, takes us outside ourselves, beyond our bodily needs, and thus helps us to transcend our physical finitude.

Yet there is also, in Cicero's momentous linguistic decision, the implication that *what* one studies, as well as *that* one studies, prepares us while alive to meet our eventual fate. Philosophy can teach endurance, forbearance, and perspective amid both joy and catastrophe. Those who live in fear of death also live in fear of pain, in fear of danger, in fear of the new; but those who accept the reality of death are freed from all these fetters.

This was stoicism as a liberation theology for the single soul, emancipating people to live here and now. And out of freedom came heroism. Told that the Thirty Tyrants ruling Athens had condemned him to death, Socrates shot back: "And nature, them." This was also the defiant attitude of all those virtuous Romans who were the subject of European history painting from the Renaissance through the Pre-Raphaelites—figures such as Regulus, who preferred slavery in Carthage to urging a shameful peace on his compatriots, or Mucius Scevola, who demonstrated the fearsomeness of the Romans by thrusting his right hand into burning coals. "It is sweet and right," went the old song, "to die for one's homeland." From this, in turn, derived the notion of the "good death": that dying with dignity and restraint, or in a good cause, proved that all the time spent living up until that moment was time well spent.

The cult of the good death outlived the Romans and became part of the classical overtones in Christian civilization. By the time Monteverdi turned the story of Seneca and Nero into opera in 1643, these ideas had become so commonplace that this Stoic philosophy could be made hummable:

Friends, the hour has come
in which I am to practice that virtue
which I have praised so much.
Death is but brief agony;
a wandering sigh leaves the heart,
where for many years
it has, so to speak, lived as a guest,
and, like a wanderer, it flies to Olympus,
the true dwelling of happiness.

Monteverdi had overlapped in Venice only briefly with Galileo; and while the astronomer had not been made to die for his ideas, he had suffered a brutal public humiliation. His fate hung heavy over all European thinkers in the years that followed. And we know that at least one of them, Fabri de Peiresc, likened it to the martyrdom of Socrates. Having written once to the pope's nephew, a friend of his, pleading for Galileo's release, in a second and more frustrated letter Peiresc shook his finger at Cardinal Francesco Barberini, warning that failure to reverse the verdict "would run the great risk of being interpreted and perhaps compared one day to the persecution of the person and wisdom of Socrates in his country, so condemned by other nations and by posterity itself."

ONLY THREE and a half decades earlier, on February 17, 1600, Giordano Bruno had been executed for his ideas, burned at the stake in the center of Rome, his tongue spiked to prevent him from speaking or crying out. In her provocative biography, a marvelous feat of scholarship, Ingrid D. Rowland brings before us today the pieces of an extraordinary sixteenth-century life. She begins, in fact, with that death, and with the memorial to it, the famous statue of the murdered thinker, on the Campo dei Fiori.

Most of the time, the brooding figure

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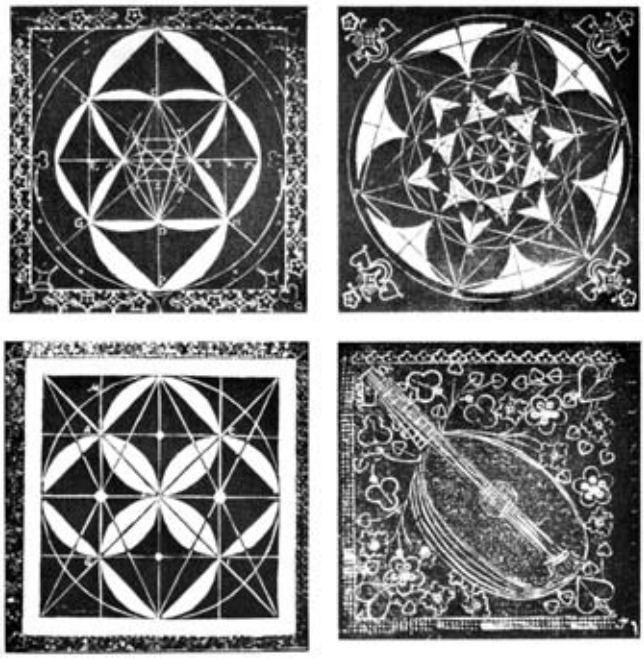
on his plinth is lost amid the diurnal market stalls and nocturnal revels that make this Roman Covent Garden such a crossroads. But on one day a year, Rowland reminds us, things on the Campo dei Fiori are different. The mayor of Rome comes and lays a wreath in the name of his city, and then various groups of ideologues come and turn the sculpture into a soapbox. The place has been consecrated to freedom of thought and speech for a long time. Already in the nineteenth century, when the sculpture was commissioned by the students of Rome and dedicated to a new patron saint, it was seen as a blow against papal domination of secular, modern, and (it was hoped) enlightened interests. (At first, Bruno's back was turned to the Vatican, but this was too much even for those who despised clericalism. Now his hooded eyes glower in the direction of his persecutors.)

The pedestal proclaims: "To Bruno, from the generation he foresaw, here, where the pyre burned." But like the statue of John Harvard in Harvard Yard, this is a statue of at least three lies. First, the statue is placed in the center of the square, not on the spot where "the pyre burned." Second, the real Bruno lacked the stature of this hulking bronze. Third, in the final decades of his life he did not wear the Dominican habit in which he has been dressed for posterity. And, though burned as an "obstinate" heretic, he tried three times to return to the Catholic confession, only to be rebuffed by the church, and he twice recanted his philosophical views (before recanting his recantation). In all its ironies, the statue is an apt introduction to the enigma of its subject.

In the century since his very public elevation, Bruno has become a central figure in the twentieth-century revision of Jacob Burckhardt's classic work *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860). Burckhardt had emphasized the role of the individual, emerging through the politics and art of the fifteenth century, while downplaying the importance of philosophy and keeping carefully to a model of creativity as rational—producing a cultural history whose lineaments were very different from those discerned in ancient Greece by his younger friend and colleague Friedrich Nietzsche. A generation later, Aby Warburg, by temperament more open to the power of emotion and by training a perceptive synthesizer (his seminar in Hamburg in 1927 was in fact devoted to Burckhardt and Nietzsche), chose to turn his—and our—attention to the psychic dimensions of the Italian Renaissance. Warburg found abundant passion and extreme stress. He understood that this might have more to do with Plato, who was finally made Latin-speaking by Lorenzo the Magnificent's in-house philosopher Marsilio Ficino, than with Aristotle, who had dominated school and university curricula since the thirteenth century. But the recovery of the Platonic Renaissance was the task of a later generation, one anchored in Warburg's own library, which escaped the *auto-da-fé* on Bebelplatz in Berlin in May 1933 and arrived in London in December of that fateful year. There the brilliant scholars D. P. Walker and Frances Yates proceeded to decode not only the impact of Plato, but also the power of the hermetic forces that Plato's legitimation helped unleash. And Bruno was for them Exhibit A.



Figures from Giordano Bruno, *One Hundred and Sixty Articles Against the Mathematicians and Philosophers of This Time*, 1588

Rowland's Bruno is different. She follows the recent tendency to take Bruno seriously as a philosopher, but gives special emphasis to the role of Plato and Neoplatonism. She also has a real ear for his poetry, and for the way early modern learned that poetry could be no less serious or didactic than a treatise. Trained as a classicist, Rowland, like her subject, has moved through a variety of academic communities, in the United States and in Italy, as well as across different disciplines. She is one of the rare academics known to a wide general audience through her essays, in these pages as well as in *The New York Review of Books*, which have helped to shape our current view of early modern Italian culture. Rowland's long years closeted with Athanasius Kircher (1601–1680), a towering and fearfully recondite intellectual of the next generation in Rome, have helped her to refine her uncommon ability to tease out meaning from even the most rebarbative texts.

## II.

Filippo Bruno—Giordano was the name he took in Orders—was born in 1548 in Nola, a city in the Neapolitan *campagna* northeast of Vesuvius, to a father who served in the occupying Spanish military and could thus fancy himself a gentleman. The boy must have been talented, because at fourteen he gained a spot as a novice in the grand convent of San Domenico Maggiore, where the children of Naples's greatest families were sent for finishing.

We know that as early as the age of seventeen Bruno was doing things that aroused the suspicion of his clerical superiors (who recorded them, providing some of the evidence on which his future accusation would be based). He cleansed his cell of images. He attacked a colleague for reading an obscure tract on the Virgin Mary. He even began to doubt the divinity of Jesus (though the evidence for this came later). Although Bruno jumped through every academic hoop that was presented to him—he seems from his youth to have had a stupendous memory in a culture that prized memory above almost everything but wealth—he also had a talent for picking fights and making enemies. Seeking, perhaps, a change of scenery in Rome, at the Dominican college of Santa Maria sopra Minerva, he had the nerve to use Augustine's words to defend the plausibility of the third-century Alexandrian heretic Arius's position on the humanity of Jesus. Technically, Bruno was correct, and was only demonstrating a logical point. Practically, he was asking for trouble: this was too controversial a topic, in a theological environment poisoned by paranoia over Protestantism, to have been accidentally plucked from midair by so potent a controversialist.

This was the last straw. The authorities

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searched the convent in Naples and found—in a latrine, no less—a marked-up copy of Erasmus, a writer deemed dangerous enough to have made the church's first list of banned books. Recalled to face his superiors, Bruno fled—first to Genoa, then to Venice, and finally across the Alps. Over the course of eleven years he wandered to Geneva, Lyon, Toulouse, Paris, Oxford, London, Wittenberg, Prague, Helmstedt, Frankfurt, Zurich, Padua, and Venice again. Betrayed to the Inquisition by a disappointed patron in 1592, he was soon shipped back to Rome once and for all.

Along his road to Calvary, like many a lonely man of faith, Bruno wrote and wrote. There are Bruno's workaday texts—workaday only in that they were produced either to secure him work or to justify work already gained. These writings were on artificial memory, Bruno's forte. Already in antiquity memory systems were a stock-in-trade of all those with important public functions. Cicero's treatise on oratory, for example, suggests both the encyclopedic range of knowledge needed by public speakers and the specific ways to remember all that stuff. Bruno's memory theaters and memory machines marked a real maturation of this practice, and also linked it directly to the more practical needs of late Renaissance rulers and courts. This was, after all, the first cold war, when Catholic and Protestant rulers faced off across the iron curtain that divided Europe after the Peace of Augsburg in 1555. Potentates grasped for small advantages, and the organization of information—for this is what memory offers—in an age of rapidly exploding information was no little prize. Both Henri III, King of France, and Rudolf II, Holy Roman Emperor, were willing to take a chance on the strange little Italian with an ambiguous confessional orientation.

But Bruno had other philosophical and even theosophical interests, and they crowded out his utilitarian wares. In the end—and the end often came after only a few months—he was too obscure, and his productions too theoretical, to hold the attention of the practically minded. And where this mattered even less, in the classroom, Bruno ran into other obstacles. Obtaining professorships in Toulouse, Paris, and Wittenberg, and lecturing in Oxford and Zurich, Bruno was too convinced of his own cleverness and too quick to demonstrate it. Having won the admiration of a colleague at Toulouse, the philosopher Francesco Sanchez, the latter pressed into his hands a copy of his just-published book, with a dedication to Bruno "in friendship and esteem." Bruno scrawled across the title page: "Remarkable that this ass professes himself a doctor." And on the first page of the text: "Remarkable that he presumes to teach." Not so surprising, then, that this refugee never found a home.

Where previous generations have focused on Bruno and memory, or on Bruno and esoteric magical traditions, Rowland gives us a Bruno who drank deeply from Plato's springs. From them he emerged a poet and a writer, in both Latin and Italian, of sometimes astounding virtuosity. Bruno comes alive for us in Rowland's translations as an Italian with a Shakespearean sense of the ebullience and the fecundity of language. One cannot read her Elizabethan-sounding translation of Bruno's five-act *Ash Wednesday Supper*, set as it was in London around 1585, and not smile with recognition; or her translation of his *Candlemaker*, a reflection on the Naples of his youth written twenty years later, without feeling that one has encountered a real literary talent—his, and hers.

Faced with the difficulty of Bruno's published works and the absence of much else from his pen, Rowland often has to chase her prey through the books and letters of contemporaries and the archives of his protectors and persecutors. So, for instance, seeking some foundation for his later theological views, she has dug deeply in the theological works produced in the Neapolitan intellectual world inherited by the young Bruno. Wondering what the older Bruno might have meant, she tracked down each and every surviving copy of a poem, and found that the hundred surviving copies all differ from one another, and that each has corrections in Bruno's own hand. Bearing this heavy burden of learning with ease, Rowland is a sure-footed guide on a ground with few tracks. This is intellectual biography at its best.

And Rowland's intellectual biography of Bruno brings alive a sixteenth-century culture that electrified Europe. Who cannot feel, across the centuries, the thrill in Bruno's question, in *Ash Wednesday Supper*, "Do we stand in the shadows, or rather they? Do we, in conclusion, who begin to renew the ancient philosophy, stand in the morning to put an end to the night, or in the evening to put an end to the day?" This is nothing less than the dawning in European consciousness of the sense of the new. (It was exactly the same question posed by Benjamin Franklin at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in 1787, wondering whether the half-sun on George Washington's chair back was rising or setting.) Bruno is a modern confronting the ancients with a gesture of recognition across a chasm of fifteen centuries. From the Florence of Brunelleschi to the Frankfurt of Leo Strauss, "ancients and moderns" has been perhaps the most crucial framework developed in Europe for theorizing time's changes. And "time" held the key to Bruno's fate.

## III.

In the light of the ecclesiastical condemnation of Copernicanism and the later trial of Galileo, it is tempting to see time telescoped and Bruno the defrocked Dominican as the astronomer's John the Baptist, heralding the coming of a new age, and killed for it. This was the inspiration for those Roman students of the last century. But as the German philosopher Hans Blumenberg made clear some years ago, in a magisterial book called *The Genesis of the Copernican World*, Bruno was no martyr for Copernicanism.

So why, then, was he killed? In this case, that is another way of asking, What was his big idea? Rowland's answer is clear and correct: his big idea was infinity. Bruno believed in an infinite universe, full of many Copernican systems, many worlds. Whence he came by this notion is a puzzle. He could have read about the idea of infinity in the work of the indisputably orthodox Nicolas of Cusa (1401–1464), or in the indisputably heterodox kabbalistic writings of Gilles of Viterbo (1465–1532). Then again, he could have cobbled the concept together out of folk experience and folly, as did his contemporary, the miller Menocchio, so magnificently portrayed by Carlo Ginzburg in *The Cheese and the Worms* (1976). Menocchio, too, would meet his fate at the Inquisition's hand.

We do not know quite when or where, but at some point between his departure from the Neapolitan convent in 1576 and his arrival in Paris in 1582 and his first publication, Bruno passed through Copernicanism on the way to the last stop on his philosophical journey. "Never shall you see the face of immense and starry Olympus / Come to an end," he writes,

> rather space fills what it continues
> conceiving
> Stars without number, indeed, whole
> worlds of these wandering bodies
> Nor can you think that of these a
> single one is less fertile
> Than earth, for all are compacted of
> the identical elements.
> Of such does measureless space shine
> by the splendor of starlight.



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The snap judgment that a philosopher of the infinite is a Copernican, and that a Copernican system expanded many times over describes an "infinite universe," seems right. The problem is that it focuses only on the spatial dimension of infinity. There is also the temporal dimension. And it is here that we find the answer to our riddles.

In his *Candlemaker* (1582), set in the Naples of his youth, Bruno puts a philosophical monologue into the mouth of the courtesan Vittoria. Rowland's emphasis is on its role in articulating "the comedy's overall meaning: 'The world is fine as it is,' *il mondo sta bene come sta*." In her reading, this jibes with a conversation in the *Heroic Frenzies* (1585) between two characters from his childhood in Nola. And their discussion of the good life turns on a recognition of its variability, and thus on the importance of being able to withstand the perils of both adversity and success—the classical *sustine et abstine* of the Stoics.

As we might expect, however, the Neapolitan hooker was no Stoic. Before she got around to concluding that she lived in the best of all possible worlds, she offered a philosophy of living. "It's important to line things up in time," she declares. "Whoever waits for time is wasting time. If I wait for time, time won't wait for me. We need to take advantage of their situation when they still think they need us. Grab the prey when it's chasing you, don't wait until it runs away." This is none other than Machiavelli's advice to the Prince on how to master Dame Fortune by seizing the occasion—and her—by force if necessary.

But time, in the shape of chronology, as Rowland herself points out elsewhere, was on many people's minds in the last decades of the sixteenth century. It was in 1583, right between publication of *The Candlemaker* and *The Heroic Frenzies*, that Joseph Scaliger in Leiden ushered in a century of chronological research with *On the Correcting of Time*. Scaliger's erudite tome was ultimately to incite a frontal assault on the identity of biblical and cultural history. Bruno's challenge was more arcane and even more direct. Believing that the world was infinitely old, as well as infinite in scope, he proposed in *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast* (1584) that the universe holds cultures and memories that have come and gone and will come and go again. Less a defense of Copernicanism than an extrapolation from Copernicus's revolution to a still more revolutionary cosmos in which our solar system was but one among many, Bruno's promise, according to Rowland, was that this grand shift in perspective "will be good for everyone's mental and spiritual health."

Rowland argues that for Bruno "the infinite stretches of time and space bred, at least ideally, an infinite tolerance for the various ways that people have sought God and wisdom." Bruno's self-proclaimed "Nolan" philosophy "meant accepting the world as it was, which in turn implied accepting a much larger definition of life in which the earth, stars, and planets were also living things, infused with divinity." This was not a mechanical universe precisely because it was filled with God's love. Rowland wants very much for Bruno's "discovery" of infinity to have had for him an explicit ethical dimension, and to have been something like a genuine acceptance of the plurality of life choices and pathways. Unfortunately, there is really no indication that Bruno himself cared to draw out these ethical implications, nor that he himself ever lived such acceptance.

According to Rowland, it is in *The Heroic Frenzies* where Bruno goes beyond; and in her discussion of it she does too, proclaiming that "the Nolan and humanity are on the threshold of something new." But the passage she then cites to support this claim is a fine example of what people—not just the English who laughed him from the podium in Oxford in 1583, but modern readers as well—might find merely frenzied, heroic or not.

> But here contemplate the harmony and consonance of all the spheres, intelligences, muses, and instruments together, where heaven, the movement of the worlds, the works of nature, the discourses of intellect, the mind's contemplation, the decrees of divine Providence, all celebrate with one accord the lofty and magnificent oscillation that equals the lower waters with the higher, exchanges night for day, and day for night, so that divinity is in all things, so that everything is capable of everything, and the infinite goodness communicates itself without end according to the full capacity of all things.

One may contemplate Bruno, admire Bruno, and even delight in Bruno without being able to make complete sense of Bruno.

A "colleague" of Bruno's, who also flew through the many heavens of the night seeking to encompass all power, beauty, and knowledge, was the literary Doctor


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Faustus: the first *Faustbuch* was published in 1587 and was set in Wittenberg, where Bruno was then on the faculty. But there is more than resemblance and proximity to go on. For the second version of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, from 1616, includes a scene in which a "Bruno" is led in chains to the pope to be "straight condemned of heresy—/—And on a pile of faggots burnt to death." While the context implies a twelfth-century German anti-pope whom the Lutheran Faustus rescues, his crime could not have been heresy, and audiences would surely have thought first about the famous late philosopher. In any event, there was no anti-pope named Bruno. Might this composite portrait mark instead a clumsy attempt to mask one Bruno's identity—still a subject of controversy—with another who possessed no real identity at all? This scene did not appear either in Marlowe's main source, the English *Faust Book* of 1592, nor in the 1604 printing of a 1601 edition of the play. It must therefore have been added subsequently—after the news of Giordano Bruno's execution spread.

Rowland tells us that he died a heretic. But what exactly was his heresy? Believing in infinite worlds was not heretical. But the consequences of this belief could be heretical. Bruno asks, in one of the prose explanations that accompanied his poem "On the immense and the numberless" (ca. 1590), "Where is place, space, vacuum, time, body? In the universe. Where is the universe? In every place, space, time, body. Is there anything outside the universe? No. Why? Because there is no place nor space nor motion nor body." We are getting closer to Bruno's offense. In the poem itself, Bruno shifted his emphasis from space to time, with decisive consequences.

> Past time or present, whichever you
> happen to choose, or the future:
> All are a single present, before God
> an unending oneness.
> Hence contradictory things can never
> persist at the same time. . . .
> Everything, when it is, because it is,
> must exist, then.

If the heresy is hard to hear in Bruno's Italian, it is made clearer in T.S. Eliot's English:

> Time present and time past
> Are both perhaps present in time
> future,
> And time future contained in time past.
> If all time is eternally present
> All time is unredeemable.

And there is no escaping this conclusion in the poem "Giordano Bruno in Prison," written by Eliot's mother, Charlotte. In this monologue, the hero proclaims

> Source of all life, whose presence
> infinite
> Dwells infinite in space, beneath
> Thy feet
> Worlds spring like flowers that open
> to the light. . . .
> In the beginning seest thou the end,
> and in the end a mere beginning still.

And then "Bruno" took the step that turned infinity into heresy: rejecting the divinity of Jesus—the same doubt the historical Bruno first discovered in himself at age eighteen. "This man was God, then, can we truly say, Yet this divinity is man *always* [emphasis added]."

Erasmus had outraged the orthodox by having a cheeky participant in "The Godly Feast," one of the charming *Colloquies* first published in 1522, proclaim in response to a brief summary of Socrates's wise words, "Saint Socrates, pray for us." Erasmus had actually imagined a doctrinally more minimal Christianity that bracketed as "things indifferent" many of the debates that had caused Christians such agony. Luther brushed Erasmus aside, like some kind of Kerensky to his real revolution, but the Roman church took his measure. They knew a threat when they read one, and so they censored, pulped, and banned his books wherever the long arm of the Holy Office reached. And it could reach even into the Neapolitan sewer system when necessary.

Yet Erasmus's challenge was superficial compared to Bruno's. For if time itself is "unredeemable," there can be no Creation, no Incarnation, and of course no Redemption. Doubting the Son, one ended up doubting the Father. This is what enabled Bruno's interrogators to draw together his youthful doubts about the divinity of the Son and his later philosophical speculations. Hauled before the Inquisition in Venice in 1592 and interrogated in Rome for seven more years, it was Bruno the Unitarian theorist—or Bruno and the specter of Unitarianism—that terrified. With Lutheranism and Calvinism on the march north of the Alps and the Italian Fausto Sozzini winning converts among Catholics in Hungary, Transylvania, and Poland to a unitarianism that his enemies called "Socinianism," Bruno may have seemed less a "lone gunman" to his inquisitors than he does to us.

Not long after his execution, though in another time, another place, and another language, another philosopher was condemned for envisioning the universe as an infinite extension of identical atoms, with God present in each of them. This was Spinoza. Long before the Roman students petitioned for Bruno's monument, another group of no longer young men made their own. They came to Bruno through Spinoza. When Friedrich Jacobi revealed that Gotthold Ephraim Lessing had declared that "there is no other philosophy than the philosophy of Spinoza," he unleashed a firestorm in Germany. But when, in the second edition of his *Spinoza Letters* in 1789, he traced Spinoza back to Bruno, and printed translated excerpts from *On the Cause, the Principle, and the One*, he gave his generation their genealogy. Soon afterward, in 1802, Schelling published *Bruno, Or on the Natural and Divine Principle of Things*. Goethe dissented: "Jordanus Brunus. I see more clearly his complete unserviceability, indeed harmfulness, for our times." Yet even he, when trying to make sense of infinity, called it "A Study Based on Spinoza." Like Spinoza, Bruno has become one of those thinkers who is either central to one's narrative of the history of thought or completely absent from it.

## IV.

Seneca's students were not yet philosophers, and so they did not understand that they ought to learn to die. They urged their teacher to live:

> Do not die, Seneca, no.
> For my part I would not wish to die.
> This life is after all so sweet,
> this sky so very clear,
> all bitterness, all poison,
> is in the end only a little evil.

We started with Montaigne and the title of his essay, "To Philosophize Is to Learn to Die." But the Essays, especially the later ones, launched also the long campaign of reconquest that transformed stern classical virtue into softer modern morals. "If we have not known how to live," Montaigne writes, "it is not right to teach us how to die. . . . If we have known how to live steadfastly and calmly we shall know how to die the same way." And living well meant just that: "Even in virtue our ultimate aim—no matter what they say—is pleasure." When Montaigne turned from the world outside to the self within, he found, remarkably, the same extraordinary range, complexity, and diversity—almost, we might say, the infinite: "I who make no other profession but getting to know myself find in me such boundless depths and variety that my apprentice-



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ship bears no other fruit than to make me know how much there remains to learn."

This discovery of his inner infinitude was therapy for Montaigne. Sharing it with his readers was intended as therapy for them. Interestingly, one of the inspirations that he drew upon for the skepticism that freed him from convention and therefore also from anxiety was none other than Francesco Sanchez, whose *That Nothing Is Known* he may have read in manuscript. This is the same text that had elicited Bruno's pitiless mockery. Could there be a sharper division between philosophy as learning to live and philosophy as learning to die? Between the infinite as a form of skepticism leading to self-knowledge and the infinite as a form of certainty leading to mean-spiritedness?

Nor in the vast heaven of Bruno's literary corpus do we find—or at least Rowland does not give it to us—the kind of clear commitment to the infinitude of the human spirit that those Roman students imagined must have led to Bruno's martyrdom. We do not find it Bruno, but we do find it a generation later in another friar of San Domenico Maggiore, and another victim of the Inquisition, Tomaso Campanella. After feigning madness through forty hours of torture, he was locked away as a madman for twenty-four more years. Eventually forced into a French exile, he reflected there on his condition.

> Man lives in a double world: according to the mind he is contained by no physical space and by no walls, but at the same time he is in heaven and on earth, in Italy, in France, in America, wherever the mind's thrust penetrates and extends by understanding, seeking, mastering. But indeed according to the body he exists not, except in only so much space as is least required, held fast in prison and in chains to the extent that he is not able to be in or to go to the place attained by his intellect and will, nor to occupy more space than defined by the shape of his body; while with the mind he occupies a thousand worlds.

Campanella recognized that to philosophize is to learn to live, not die. There is something about our long fascination with Bruno that seems to signify a lingering attachment to that older notion of death as the validation of life. Would that we could instead have a Bruno to live by! A Bruno whose language and imagination spoke to us, with no spiked tongue and no fiery-faced defiance. We need this now more than ever. ◆

# David Nirenberg
# CHOOSING LIFE

**MEMOIRS**
By Hans Jonas
Edited by Christian Wiese
Translated by Krishna Winston
(Brandeis University Press, 320 pp., $35)

**THE LIFE AND THOUGHT OF HANS JONAS: JEWISH DIMENSIONS**
By Christian Wiese
(Brandeis University Press, 292 pp., $50)

## I.

Hans Jonas was a philosopher, not a prophet, but his teachings speak as powerfully to our age of global warming, global markets, and Manichaean geopolitics as they did to the century of world wars in which he developed them. From his Weimar investigations of early Christian dualist mythologies to his discovery of the new field of bioethics in the baby boom–era suburbs of New York, Jonas's warning over the course of an astoundingly long philosophical career was always the same: that the unconstrained power of the human will threatens the possibility of life.

For the first half of his career, that warning went largely unheeded. No theologian or philosopher in Weimar or Nazi Germany paid much attention to the contemporary political and theological implications of Jonas's dissertations on Gnosticism and early Christianity, least of all Martin Heidegger, under whose direction they were written. Jonas's prediction—produced in Palestine in 1939, some two years before the Wannsee conference decided the fate of Europe's Jews—that the mythic structures of National Socialism demanded the extermination of the Jewish "species-being" went similarly unnoticed. It was only in the 1960s and 1970s, as breakthroughs in military, industrial, and biomedical engineering spread the threat of extermination from one particularly stigmatized form of "species-being" to the possibility of all life, that his warning took wing.

Late in his career, Jonas became the philosopher of planetary life in a technological age that seemed bent on its destruction. His writings influenced the birth of the modern environmental movement, providing the philosophical foundations for its most effective political manifestation, the German Green Party. His bioethical teachings have found an echo even in our fantasies, amplified through trilogies such as Ursula LeGuin's *Earth-Sea* and Garth Nix's *Abhorsen*. Now, with the translation of his *Memoirs* some fifteen years after his death, we have a chance to step into a life that has remarkably much to say to our own.

Jonas was born in 1903 in Mönchengladbach, a quiet town in western Germany, and his memoir begins in his birthplace, with the young Hans starved for great deeds. Unsated by the heroes of the past—Achilles, Napoleon—he devours newsprint in search of stories about sinking ships (the *Titanic*) and distant wars (the Balkans). His own life he finds boring: "To me it was a sad fate to have been born into a period and a world where everything was in tip-top order and the only real excitement was to be found in history books and occasionally also in the paper." Of course the world into which Jonas was born turned out to be anything but tip-top, and his life proves exciting even by the standards of our digitally enhanced age.

In part this is because his memories span nearly a century of breathtaking change. To put it in terms of technology—an appropriate measure for a man who became the most rigorous philosopher of its perils—Jonas entered the world a month ahead of Henry's first Ford and left it just weeks before the launching of the World Wide Web. But the thrill of Jonas's story stems as much from its epic style as from the storm-tossed sea of time that it traverses. Jonas is one of those characters, like Odysseus or Beowulf, who is sworn to uphold the heroic norms of his society, even as he becomes an acute critic of the mythic structures that underpin them. His life lacked neither battles nor bravery.

At school he was a "holy terror," a Jewish paladin who would go blind with rage at any insult to his people. "Everything would literally go black before my eyes, probably from the blood rushing to my head, and I would hurl myself at the offending person." In those days his favorite hero, like the young Freud's, was Hannibal, "because he was the great 'Semitic' general

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who had given the 'Aryans' a good thrashing, who'd shown them that you can't just push the 'Semites' around." When World War I broke out, he was too young to fight for Germany, but not too young for patriotic dreams of honor and great deeds. The rising anti-Semitism of the Weimar Republic eroded the patriotism, and the Nazi victory crushed it completely, but the dream of action did not dim.

Already as a teenager in Weimar that dream had encouraged him to choose Zionism over any of the assimilationist alternatives on offer to the children of the German-Jewish bourgeoisie, whether the liberal ones so dear to his parents or the Marxist ones attracting so many of his peers. As an adult under Hitler, it shaped his reactions to the racist legislation and the Jew-hatred that increasingly surrounded him. The disastrous end of a hike he took with a Christian girlfriend in 1933 seems characteristic. While the couple was dining at a local inn, a group of hefty lumberjacks began to serenade the crowd with the "charming refrain" of a folksong: "When Jewish blood from the knife blade spurts / Then all will be well again." "As soon as I heard that I said 'Come on, pull out your knives. Here I am. Here's a Jew.'" There was sudden silence. His girlfriend, fearing for their lives if she was recognized as a Christian, was terror-stricken, but a police official happened to be in the room and had them escorted out of his district immediately. Jonas's conclusion was that the incident was "a complete moral victory for me."

When Jonas left Germany later that year, chased away by the Nazis' new racist laws, he "vowed never to return except as a soldier in a conquering army." He felt that "precisely because they were considered to be softies, cowards, and weaklings, Jews could wash away such affronts to their honor only with blood." The outbreak of World War II found him living in Mandate Palestine, where in 1939 he wrote an exhortation to heroism titled "Our Part in This War: A Word to Jewish Men":

> This is our hour, this is our war … the hour when it would be allowed to us after powerlessly enduring all the ignominy … to finally confront our arch enemy eye to eye, with weapon in hand; to demand retribution.… This [is] a bellum judaicum [a Jewish war] in the profoundest sense of the word.… Yudah with the world against the world-enemy.… It is a war of two principles of which the one also holds in trust, in the form of Christian-occidental humanity, Israel's legacy to the world—while the other, the cult of power and contempt for humanity, signifies the absolute negation of this legacy.… It would be an eternal shame for the Jewish people if we … did not show our flag … in the main theater of the war. We expect from the Jewish people this act, this proof of its manliness, this contribution to the mastery of its own fate.

Jonas lived up to his own expectations. Although he was already approaching middle age, he enlisted in the British army and became an artilleryman in what would eventually be its Jewish Battalion. He spent some eight years under arms, beginning in 1936 with his service in the Haganah, the "underground Jewish self-defense forces" of Mandate Palestine, through the Italian campaigns of the war, and then again in 1948, when he was drafted into the newborn army of Israel to man the guns defending besieged Jerusalem.

For a man who dreamed so much of heroes as a child, it is striking that in the relatively few pages that he devotes to these martial years in his memoirs there is scarcely a word about what others might see as the glories of war. Surveying the ruins of Germany as part of the conquering army, he admits with sorrow to the satisfactions of vengeance. But like the blind schoolyard rages of his youth, his battles in Europe and Israel were not motivated by any yearning for a "muscular Judaism" (a coarse vitalism from which he explicitly distances himself). They were the product, rather, of a profoundly psychosomatic ethics, an ethics in which the organism is constantly compelled to stake its very being in defense of the essential truths by which it lives. Not only does this ethics tint every page of Jonas's life story, it also provides the substance of the philosophy that made him famous.

There is something wonderfully archaic about the unity of organic life and philosophical thought in Jonas's *Memoirs*, and it is this archaism that gives all of his writing its peculiar power. By the mid–twentieth century, philosophy—above all "Anglo-Saxon" philosophy—had evolved from its pre-modern status as "a way of life" to become a profession. It had succeeded in scientizing itself, and in exchange it happily surrendered most of its ancient responsibility to teach us how to live, or to assign value to our existence. Modern theory and modern science, as Jonas explained in *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology*, which appeared in 1966, are "value-free." Since they believe that "the validation of value requires a transcendence whence to derive it," they consider value as non-rational. "Relation to an objective transcendence lies today outside theory by its rules of evidence," Jonas writes, "whereas formerly it was the very life of theory."

ANTHONY RUSSO

Jonas's goal was to reverse this abdication. Like his friend Leo Strauss, Jonas wanted to reconstruct some of the moral foundations of human thought that had been shattered by secular modernity. But whereas Strauss focused his efforts on the restoration of natural right as a normative basis for political life, Jonas strove for the rights of nature itself. His goal was to establish that life—not only human life, but all organic life—makes a claim to freedom and subjectivity. Insofar as the organism differentiates itself metabolically from the surrounding physical world and constantly re-asserts its self-maintaining identity within that world, it possesses "selfhood." And insofar as it struggles to maintain this precarious distinction in the face of the constant possibility of its disappearance into the non-being that will engulf it in the end, it possesses "subjectivity," which is to say, the desire and capacity for freedom. "It is in the dark stirrings of primeval organic substance," Jonas startlingly concluded, "that a principle of freedom shines forth for the first time within the vast necessity of the physical universe—a principle foreign to suns, planets, and atoms."

*The Phenomenon of Life* marked a watershed in Jonas's career. Before its publication in 1966, he had been largely known for the researches on Gnosticism that he had undertaken in the 1920s and 1930s under the direction of Heidegger and Rudolph Bultmann. Now he was becoming increasingly famous as a philosopher of life—a sharp critic of the nihilistic cultures of modernity that had proved capable of producing the Holocaust, a founding father of environmental thought, and a pioneer in biological and medical ethics.

In his *Memoirs*, Jonas dismisses his early work on Gnosticism as a "journeyman's project," and prefers to stress the philosophical biology of his later years, but elsewhere in his work there is plenty of evidence for an intimate interrelation between the two. In "Gnosticism, Existentialism, and Nihilism," an essay that he published in 1952, Jonas suggested that the



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alienation of the ancient Gnostic from the created world was similar to that of the modern nihilist, with this difference: whereas the Gnostic creation had at least a negative transcendence, the modern one is completely indifferent, utterly wanting in the possibility of any and all transcendence, and therefore more terrifying. Already in the seventeenth century, with God not yet dead but increasingly non-interventionist in his creation, Pascal was getting scared: "Cast into the infinite immensity of spaces of which I am ignorant, and which know me not, I am frightened." But the terror of scientific modernity, entirely stripped of any teleological view of nature, is much worse. "That nature does not care, one way or the other, is the true abyss," Jonas declared. "That only man cares, in his finitude facing nothing but death, alone with his contingency and the objective meaninglessness of his projecting meanings, is a truly unprecedented situation."

This essay stages in miniature all the grand themes of Jonas's work. From his early studies of ancient dualisms to his later studies of modern ones, the goal of all his thinking was to help humanity deal with the "truly unprecedented situation" of its modern alienation from nature. He clearly believed that without a philosophy capable of teaching us how to live in this state of crisis, humanity would end by destroying the very possibility of life on earth. Equally clear is his sense of which philosophies had already shown themselves inadequate to this urgent task: chief among them the existentialism of his teacher Heidegger, which had failed so spectacularly to help that philosopher make an ethical choice when confronted with the triumphant power of Nazi nihilism in 1933.

Jonas did not content himself with exposing the inability of previous philosophies to reconcile Being with nature. Instead, he set out to show that "Being, in the testimony it gives of itself, informs us not only about what it is but also about what we owe it." By this he meant that through its constant struggle to maintain its Being in the face of the non-Being that always threatens it, every organic metabolism reveals to humanity its "binding obligation to the guarding of being." The extraordinary point was that organic life itself contains the ethics that we need to learn.

Following Kant, Jonas articulated that ethics as an imperative. Kant's categorical imperative had been "Act so that you can will that the maxim of your action be made the principle of a universal law." Jonas's imperative—first articulated in 1973 in his essay "Technology and Responsibility: Reflections on the New Tasks of Ethics"—was more biological and less individual: "Act so that the effects of your actions are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life." In 1979 Jonas published a book-length articulation of this ethics in German, titled (in its English translation five years later) *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*. A difficult book of serious philosophy, *The Imperative of Responsibility* promptly sold some 200,000 copies, and catapulted the seventy-six-year-old Jonas to rock-star status in his native land.

## II.

Like Bob Dylan's *Chronicles*, Hans Jonas's *Memoirs* are an account of the many encounters that go into the formation of a creative voice, an account steeped in gratitude for the sheer luck required to shape such a voice and bring it recognition. In a sense, the memoirs themselves are the result of just such an encounter, this one with two young "fans" in Munich, a graduate student named Stephan Sattler and a bookseller named Rachel Salamander. In 1989, after several years of friendship, the two convinced the octogenarian sage to sit for a series of recorded interviews that eventually filled thirty-three tapes. Edited into continuous narrative and annotated by Christian Wiese, the result is an extraordinary book, no less fascinating for being peopled with philosophers instead of folksingers.

This is not a book for readers in search of gossip about the intellectual giants of an earlier age. Its recollections are unmoved by resentments and uninterested in the diminution of rival reputations. With the exception of some cruel words about Jacob Taubes, a fellow émigré philosopher-theologian whom Jonas (like many others) despised, Jonas's portraits are painted with a sharp eye but a generous brush. He treats his family with a loving piety reminiscent of Nabokov's *Speak, Memory*. His relations with his famous friends—Hannah Arendt and Gershom Scholem are the most often mentioned of many—were not always easy, but they always reveal a man with a gift for critical love.

That gift sometimes failed. After Jonas's departure from Jerusalem, his friendship with Scholem degenerated into a low academic quarrel about the origins of Gnosticism, a quarrel in which Jonas did not always do justice to Scholem's ideas. But it could also triumph spectacularly, as in the relationship between Jonas and Arendt. Close friends since their days together as students of Bultmann and Heidegger, their sympathy survived all the separations of exile to resume once again when the New School reunited them in New York. What it almost did not survive was the publication of Arendt's *New Yorker* articles on "Eichmann in Jerusalem." Jonas's horror at what he took to be Arendt's ignorant caricature of Judaism and Zionism drove him to express his criticism to her directly in 1963, in a letter that also predicted that she would be unable to hear: "But the paradox is that precisely the hopelessness makes the effort unavoidable, for in the case of a life-long friend … one cannot say: she is lost, without having tried everything." In his *Memoirs*, Jonas describes the result:

> Hannah was obsessed. Anyone who spoke out against her was either stupid or in the pay of the enemy. Suddenly the entire foundation of our trust for one another collapsed, everything that had made it possible for us to be tolerant of each other's views.… That was an attitude I couldn't have anymore, for the way she was behaving didn't deserve respect.

Jonas re-opened relations with Arendt after two years of silence, relations that attained the depth so movingly expressed in his eulogy at her funeral in 1975: "You kept faith, you were always there. We all are the poorer without you. The world has become colder without your warmth." That eulogy is a generous monument to a friendship, but the letter of 1963 is an even more generous one: to friendship that is critical, not blind, and that never gives up hope in the possibility of communication.

The same generosity is evident in Jonas's treatment of his famous teachers. Husserl, Jaspers, Heidegger, Bultmann: all emerge with their flaws and their foibles, but with their dignity and greatness intact. Not even Heidegger is demonized:

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Heidegger, whom Jonas drolly calls the "Lubavitcher rebbe" of Marburg because his brilliant philosophy attracted so many Jewish students from all over Germany, but whose willingness to answer the Nazi call for "de-judaification" in 1933 was for Jonas the greatest example of a philosophical "catastrophe." As a student, Jonas's contact with his aloof supervisor was distant and infrequent, but the case of Heidegger looms over Jonas's narrative, reminding us of the dark shadows that mottled Jonas's world in the 1930s and 1940s—shadows that help to explain why, for all his generosity of spirit, Jonas does not hesitate to castigate and to condemn.

The chapter dedicated to his "Travels Through a Germany in Ruins" contains the most terrible of these condemnations. As a member of the conquering army, he returned to his hometown of Mönchengladbach, trying to learn his mother's fate. He met a Jewish survivor at the refugee center there who recognized his name: "Then she burst into tears and said, 'I was with your mother in Łódź [where she was first deported], but she was sent to Auschwitz in 1942.' Everyone knew what that meant—Auschwitz—and that was how I learned of my mother's death." The murder of his mother remained a terrible wound for Jonas until the end of his life, and became for him a crime against which all the ethical claims of German philosophy could be measured. Measured by such a standard, the great philosophers were not those you might expect. When Bultmann told Jonas that Julius Ebbinghaus, a dogmatic Kantian with whom Jonas had once studied, was "one of the people whose behavior was really magnificent," Jonas decided to visit him in order to express his "admiration for the strong stand he had taken":

> Ebbinghaus then said something I'll never forget: "Yes, Jonas, but I want to say one thing: without Kant it wouldn't have been possible for me to survive this period." … At that I suddenly saw clearly what it means to live by one's philosophy. Such steadfastness reduces Heidegger, the far more important and original philosopher, to a non-entity. What the Kantian had grasped, and the existential philosopher hadn't, was that philosophy also imposes the obligation to live and behave in a way that can withstand public scrutiny.

Jonas did not see Heidegger during his time in occupied Germany, and in fact he refused to meet his former teacher for many years to come. When they finally did "reconcile," in 1973, Jonas remained deeply dissatisfied, and the terms of his unhappiness are revealing. "If I'd hoped that anything would be said about the events after 1933, about the fate of the Jews in Germany, about my mother's death, I was bitterly disappointed again." From the perspective of applied ethics (rather than that of courtesy or empathy), it may seem odd to expect Heidegger to apologize for the death of Jonas's mother, a woman whom he had never met, who had lived and died far outside his ken. But as far as Jonas was concerned, it was precisely this refusal to take responsibility for life that was the fatal flaw in Heidegger's teachings. "It's my conviction," says Jonas at his most lapidary, "that ontology necessarily entails a doctrine of obligation."

Jonas also believed that "modern analytic-positivistic philosophy counts among the errors in thought," a position left more or less vacant since Kant. "I'm sure I'm right about this," he insists: "being can tell us something about how we should live … about the responsibilities that we human beings, acting consciously and freely, must fulfill." This is a position with many consequences, not only for the philosopher, but also for the biographer. For if "being" tells us something about how we should live, then our biography becomes proof of our ontology. Does a philosopher's behavior withstand ethical scrutiny? If so, this speaks well for his ideas. If not—and here the chief example for Jonas was Heidegger—then it does not. How we live and how we die: this, for Jonas, was the truest test of our philosophies.

As a memoirist, Jonas can be accused of simultaneously setting the test and taking it. He is, after all, the author of both a philosophy of life and of the life against which it will be measured. I do not think that the legitimacy of this accusation marks his recollections as suspect, but it certainly does give his *Memoirs* a flavor of ethical exemplarity that we no longer expect in the autobiographies of our professors. In a way this autobiography is closer to the *vitae* of pre-modern philosophers or medieval saints, in which the protagonists' way of life and death demonstrates the truth of their ideals. The moment of death was thought to be especially revealing—which was why seventeenth-century polemicists squabbled about how the "atheist" Spinoza had faced the terrors of mortality (by most accounts, he managed admirably), and why Boswell scurried to Hume's deathbed in 1776, looking for cracks in that philosopher's famous skepticism about the immortality of the soul (the fact that he found none disturbed him "for some time"). Fittingly, Jonas's wife Lore tells us in her "introductory remarks" that he was not afraid of death. He knew, like the Psalmist, how to "count our days." The end of his life was thus in keeping with his teaching, which warned of the threat posed by humanity's fear-driven quest for immortality to the sustainability of life on earth.

Nietzsche once claimed that every philosophy resolves itself into autobiography. Today the claim seems either sociologically banal—ideas are the product of their social context—or ontologically ridiculous. What professional would accept such a congruence between life and publications? The thrill of Jonas's *Memoirs*, and the scandal of his philosophy, is that they force us to confront the relationship once more, though in a way very far from what Nietzsche intended. Creation, says Jonas, teaches an ethics of obligation, and the way we live reveals how well we have learned it. This is not a

## July 20, 1969

Snail-track of jism? No, that was the moon
silvering the tongue-and-groove of floor,
my parents arguing outside on the stair,
the primal "We should get a divorce" scene

(sound up and over: from *The Guiding Light*).
I slept. I woke. And there in the TV's
old one-eye, pallid figures up to the knees
in last winter's wood ashes, utter night,

dark as whatever I could put my mind to,
twinkling overhead, while Father Frost
guarded the empty hearth and Madame Triste
slung firewater as she was wont to do,

their voices faint with joy or just with distance.
And so from history I birthed myself,
beyond the orbits of these two whom love
prevented from admitting my existence.

I crossed a threshold in my body somewhere,
I felt it, and there was no going back.
Lie still, I said, and coast the roaring dark.
Light fled in its frail line beneath the door.

KARL KIRCHWEY



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message with much appeal to contemporary departments of philosophy. It did not help that Jonas was willing, like Plato and many other pre-modern philosophers, to cast his teachings in the form of myths; or that he sometimes advocated the deployment of a "heuristics of fear" to constrain human behavior; or that he occasionally countenanced discussions about the relationship between God and the cosmos. All this explains why, within the halls of American academe, Jonas has attracted much less attention than his friends Scholem, Strauss, and Arendt.

### III.

The appearance of Jonas's *Memoirs* and of Christian Wiese's accompanying study marks something of a revival of interest in this genuinely significant thinker. (It will happily continue this winter with the publication of Benjamin Lazier's stunning study of Jonas and company, *God Interrupted: Heresy and the European Imagination Between the World Wars*.) What accounts for this revival? The answer, I suspect, has less to do with the increasing importance of environmental concerns than it does with changes within the academy itself. In part, Jonas is caught up in the great awakening of interest in Weimar intellectuals—such as Walter Benjamin and Carl Schmitt—that has acquired new urgency in the decades since 1989, as thinkers on both the left and the right cast about for new critical languages with which to address the dangers they perceive in a triumphant neo-liberalism. In part, he benefits from the de-secularization of these same decades. With the return of religion to the respectable ranks of academic discourse, the more transcendental implications of Jonas's philosophy no longer embarrass. Finally, perhaps the most provincial explanation for the appearance of these books (and for their publication by Brandeis University Press) has to do with the rapid expansion of the discipline of Jewish studies since the 1970s. There is now a subdiscipline called "Jewish philosophy," and it needs "Jewish philosophers" to study, and Jonas looks like a good candidate.

Wiese's book is devoted to making the case for the "Jewish dimensions" of Jonas's philosophy. But what does it mean to speak of "Jewish philosophy"? If it means any philosophy written by Jews, then we are claiming that the religion of the thinker suffices to classify the thought. But if it means a philosophy developed from or engaged with the textual corpus of rabbinic Judaism, then neither Jonas nor most of the other mainstream philosophers nowadays classified as "Jewish" would qualify, since with very few exceptions (Solomon Maimon, Emmanuel Lévinas) their philosophical indifference to (not to say ignorance of) Talmud is almost total. And what are we to do with the many non-practicing, often non-believing, but "ethnically" Jewish thinkers, those whom Isaac Deutscher called "non-Jewish Jews"? What is it that might make their philosophy "Jewish"?

Wiese does not so much answer this question as propose a new category for Jonas. He calls him a "profoundly Jewish non-Jewish Jew." He suggests that Jonas had a sense of religiosity. Late in life Jonas even acknowledged his belief in a God whom he described with a term drawn from the traditional liturgy: *rotseh ba-hayyim*, he who wills life, although he did not think this God capable of intervening actively in creation. Wiese documents Jonas's admiration for the ethical voice of the Hebrew prophets, and his sense that their teachings could provide an antidote to the modern nihilism and irresponsibility that threaten to extinguish the possibility of life on earth. From all this he concludes that Jonas's work "at best can only be partially understood if one neglects his relationship to twentieth-century Jewish thought and to his sense of what it meant to be Jewish."

Though this conclusion is surely right, it seems strained to call any of this "profoundly Jewish." Indeed, these were the attributes of Jonas's thought—especially his "Protestant" preference for a pure prophetic Judaism—that led Scholem to characterize it as "too Christian." For my part, I think it is an error to attribute this or that aspect of a philosopher's thought to Athens or to Jerusalem. Nor can we easily distinguish between what is Jewish and what is Christian in a given philosophy, as Jonas himself tried to do in one of his least successful essays. These categories were born out of each other. They are so inter-penetrated, so codependent, that they cannot be separated without excessive loss.

And yet there *is* something profoundly Jewish about this non-Jewish Jew, something that has less to do with any specific content drawn from the Jewish textual tradition and more with sensibility—specifically, with the sensibility that Jonas, like Scholem, was so shocked to find wanting in Arendt: *ahavat yisrael*, the love of Israel, of the Jewish people, and the commitment to it as a community of fate. Beginning with his earliest schoolyard brawls, every aspect of Jonas's life seems steeped in this sensibility, and all his work, from his studies of the Gnostics' "metaphysical anti-Semitism" to his defense of organic life, has its roots in this commitment. There is a tremendous achievement here, one whose beauty becomes evident only by comparison. Jonas's ability to move from love of Israel to love of the world without leaving the former, to attend to the universal without abandoning the particular, was as rare in his age as it is in ours. Arendt understood *ahavat yisrael* much as centuries of Christian polemicists had done, as an ethnic particularism incompatible with belief in all humanity. Simone Weil's flight toward universal love took her even further from her native Judaism—she regarded it as a misanthropic horror—into what can fairly be called anti-Semitism.

But Jonas perceived very early the link between defending Judaism and defending life. Writing to his teacher Bultmann in 1929, he explained why Jesus's criticism of the Pharisees in the Gospels troubled him far less than the seventh chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Romans, with its description of how "with the advent of the Law sin came alive, and I died." Jonas saw in Paul the beginning of a tradition that simultaneously attacked Judaism and the life of the body in terms of each other. "As a Jew," he wrote to Bultmann, "I feel myself attacked by Jesus' critique not essentially, but only in a particular [Pharisaic] expression of Jewish piety. By Paul, however, I feel myself essentially and basically struck, so that neither as a Jew nor a man would I have something to defend myself against [him]."

Jonas was an able student of the long history of thought—Christian, Gnostic, and philosophical—that turned the Jew into a figure for the flesh. This history taught him that the defense of Judaism was therefore a defense of life itself. It is no accident that the first words of *The Phenomenon of Life* were written in 1944, two decades before its actual publication, while Jonas was fighting for the "Jewish Battalion" on the battlefields of Italy: "It is in the dark stirrings of primeval organic substance that a principle of freedom shines forth for the first time." For Jonas, the Jews and organic life were bound together in one common love, in one destiny. Is this "profoundly Jewish"? I don't know. It certainly turns a widespread Jewish suspicion of naturalism on its head. But whether or not it is "Jewish," it is profoundly Jonas. Naturalism was not a constraint for him, but a great release into the most universal ethic of all, and the same can be said of his Jewishness. This, I think, was Jonas's most original achievement. He put Judaism and the organism side by side at the gates of freedom, fighting for existence against extermination. ◆



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Helen Vendler

# OBLIVION CITY

**ASHES FOR BREAKFAST: SELECTED POEMS**
By Durs Grünbein
Translated by Michael Hofmann
(Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 298 pp., $16)

Although some poems by Durs Grünbein had been published in journals here and in England, it was not until the appearance of this volume, crisply and colloquially translated by Michael Hofmann, that an English-speaking reader could approach Grünbein's coruscating writing. Grünbein was born in Dresden, in East Germany, in 1962, and moved to East Berlin as a young adult. "I was happy in a sandy no-man's land," the poet wrote in 1991, evoking his student life in the East by casting himself, in his devastatingly ironic sonnet sequence "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Border Dog (Not Collie)," as a patrol dog "in the suicide strip, equidistant from East and West." "I was half zombie, half *enfant perdu*," he says, "myself just a cipher in a simultaneous equation." With the fall of the Wall in 1989, with even the "two or three names for the place of separation" vanishing into oblivion, "nothing is left to recall the trick / By which a strip of land became a hole in time."

"Being a dog," says a defining poem early in "Portrait of the Artist," "is having to when you don't want to, wanting to / When you can't, and always somebody watching." The frustration of being restricted in will and placed under surveillance emerges in the iron grip of Grünbein's epigram. The young poet left the East as soon as possible, only to discover the vices and the disappointments of the West. Although he became permanently ill at ease with respect to place, he is supremely at home in language, a writer of notable essays (appearing in translation from Farrar, Straus & Giroux in 2010) as well as of these masterful poems. He has won prize after prize in Germany for his poetry.

Even I, with no formal knowledge of German (but, after years of lieder and opera, able to follow it haltingly), couldn't help but stay awake all night reading Grünbein's severe work—an absolutely unignorable body of verse. With Grünbein, as with other poets whose language I did not know—Milosz, Szymborska, Tranströmer—I have felt compelled to write about the work on the principle that these poets are so striking, even in translation, that some proportion of their poetic qualities could be described and investigated from outside their own language. Many things from foreign poems can be imported into consciousness—montages of images, epigrams, historical panoramas, allegorical emblems, passages of personal distress—and English-speaking poets have often owed significant developments in their own writing to works they cannot read in the original. (Seamus Heaney's *The Haw Lantern*, for example, was visibly influenced by Eastern European poetry.)

*Ashes for Breakfast* contains only what Michael Hofmann found himself able and willing to translate from a very large mass of work. Hofmann, who is capable of extraordinary stylistic invention, says of the "tracing" required in translation, "I have the ability, I think, to go over lines, and make it seem like freehand":

> The worst thing in a translation, it seems to me, is the appearance of being remote-controlled, *ferngesteuert*. You have to look comfortable, voluntary. The Grünbein translations will look like—I hope to God they do look like—not the product of steel rulers and midnight oil, but like poems that want to be poems.... What I'm anxious *not* to do is offer something exotic, wooden, pointless, and dead.

Hofmann can be proud: his language is springy on the page. And even if it must, from time to time, depart rather far from the actual word-for-word brilliance of Grünbein's line, it usually keeps the poet's import and tone. And tone in Grünbein—dry, sarcastic, impassioned, aggressive—is as crucial as the electric metaphors that invigorate the poetry. There is hardly a page here that does not contain a real poem, out of Grünbein by Hofmann, a poem "real" enough—in emotion, in cadence, in imagination—to make a reader's hair stand on end.

What was it in Grünbein that so seized my attention? It was the sardonic humor, the savagery, the violent candor—all expressed in lines of cool formal elegance. In Grünbein's pages, uncontrollable feeling encounters the at first invisible control of an expert technique, creating that exciting "deadlock" of equally strong matter and manner that Robert Frost in his *Notebooks* found essential to poetry. Grünbein's earlier poems are allowed more sprawl than the later ones (which are hard, tight, classical even when they are most slangy or scandalous in indignation). His successive volumes are linked by a submerged autobiography (usually impersonally expressed), which in its unfolding draws the reader on from poem to poem. (With regret, I have represented all of Grünbein's lines as flush left, because of the limitations of column width.) One of the earliest autobiographical poems in this collection, "Trilce, César"—about Grünbein's discovery of Vallejo—shows the poet as one of East Germany's young generation of writers longing to escape a boring stasis, a deadening isolation:

> There were days it was all we could
> manage
> to say, "It may never happen" or
> "Something will turn up ..." bored in
> overheated libraries where, in moments
> before they completely glazed over
> our glances found themselves drifting
> like smoke rings
> under the lofty coffered ceilings
> of Alexandrian reading rooms.
> Most of us
> wanted to get away (to New York
> or someplace): we were students
>
> with funny cracked voices
> enthusiastically turning
> failed projects in our heads.

The early poems are pervaded by the deterioration of East Germany, where the poet's aesthetic sense is stifled. He groans as his gaze passes from place to place: in a "bubbling stream" with "old auto tires, broken glass, / household junk," and "polystyrene and crap," there bobs a child's toy, a "yellow plastic duck," and at the sign of this filth-covered souvenir of innocence the poem resists its own disgust, imploring: "*Kommt / Wellen klaren Wassers, kommt*"—"Come, waves of crystal waters, come." The ghost of Schubert's flowing water and the "Come" of "Veni Creator" hover behind the repellent polluted brook, one of many cases in which the shades of lost ideals form the implicit background to Grünbein's jeremiads.

The free-verse "Trilce, César" appeared in Grünbein's early book *Mornings in the Grayzone*. The book tightens up considerably with a series called "Monological



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Poems," manifestos exploring the poet's aesthetic: like Yeats, he aims at poems at once cold and passionate. As Grünbein wittily puts it in "Monological Poem #1,"

> There are hot forms and
> cold forms and poems
>
> no matter how you break them and
> what you print them on
>
> are always cold (no matter how
> hot they were at the manufacturing
> stage).

But in spite of his ambition to remain in cold charge of his hot material, Grünbein, like many another poet, discovers that poems have a will of their own, often the contrary mirror-image of his own conscious aims. As he writes in the equally witty "Monological Poem #4,"

> You pursue your own
> eccentric designs you re-
>
> fine the images you order
> the moments but you don't
>
> listen to them
> as quite differently in their own ways
>
> they pursue their eccentric
> designs refine
>
> images show chance movements
> move differently
>
> in the same spaces and damned
> if they're going to listen to you. That
>
> is the nub.

"*Das / ist der springende Punkt*," says the German, "that is the crucial point" of poetry: it has to awaken itself under the poet's hand and sketch out its own desires. It was inevitable that Grünbein, with his elegant architectural sense, should see, and wryly rue, the way in which the poem of the linguistic unconscious runs in competition with the one pursued by the poet's will.

The result of the opening of the West to Grünbein's scrutiny was the extraordinarily unsettled 1994 sequence called "Variations on No Theme," composed of thirty-nine untitled and unrhymed thirteen-line quasi-sonnets (deriving, says Hofmann, from Brodsky's "A Part of Speech"). Grünbein's "Variations" seem the exacerbated utterances of a mind in terminal distress, imagining, even when taking a shower, surreal threats linked to the German past:

> And in the morning, you turn on the
> shower
> And out comes . . . water, what did you
> think?
> Red and blue stand for hot and cold.
> The skin wasn't peeled off in strips like
> wallpaper.
> That's just a nightmare, silly.
> There's no thorn in the towel, no blood
> On the tiles—the plug hole's gurgle
> Signifies cleanliness, not death.
> As to whether they still make soap
> Out of bones, the foam drying
> On the lines of your palms takes the
> fifth.
> Dragged along by the hair, briefly, fear-
> Fully animated, a short-lived suspicion
> dies.

Possessing neither the formal perfection of the fourteen-line sonnet nor the twelve-line balance of the douzain, these thirteen-line poems are models of disequilibrium. Avoiding the first-person "I," as he often does, and resorting here to brief second-person self-address, Grünbein adopts, as a sign of precariously maintained stability, the pretext of a tone of absolute objectivity: "Red and blue stand for hot and cold." When, in another poem, the speaker finds his external surroundings unreal, only books remain as sustenance:

> Unreal, the room you live in by yourself,
> The fly-spotted mirror, dust
> In the corners clustering round a long
> hair
> That's been lying there for weeks.
> No bowl of fruit, no vase,
> The only cornucopias, stacked tight,
> Are the books.

In German, the "long hair" is a *Frauenhaar*, a woman's hair: the forlorn room has lost its other inhabitant.

The mode of this member of the sequence, one of disenchanted inventory, governs many of the chilling "Variations," which embark on an autobiographical journey. Grünbein begins with birth, when the cutting of the umbilical cord is the first sundering by the Fates; now, the "trusting smile" of the earliest photographs dissolves and rejects the present gaze of the speaker. Childhood brings "the conspiracy / Among the growns to feed and stifle you," provoking "Great clouds of hysteria / Where you learned to walk, and to fight back." In time, a form of unbearable response begins to stain everything with horror—from a fishmonger's shop to a cat's cry:

> With a shudder
> You see the crab with rubber bands
> Round its claws, the trout and eel
> nuzzling
> The slimy belly of the vast carp.
> A cat cries in the car trunk for air.

As "Variations" continues, the green of spring and the song of the blackbird induce a temporary relenting of the malice of time, but even then, the speaker is conscious of graves under his feet:

> Nothing is lost, not while grass sprouts
> From every crack. . . .
> How your heart leaps
> To hear the scolding blackbird
> Defend her patch of lawn by the side
> of the road,
> And green everywhere. Your walk
> takes you
> Over graves, knocked down to pathway.

Nature's rebirth, however welcome in itself, cannot cure the intensity of exposure present in the most shocking (if still impersonally phrased) self-portrait in "Variations," the poem that opens, "Shivering under masks of knowledge." "*So wird man Sarkast*," "This is how one becomes sarcastic," Grünbein explains. The poem anatomizes the human being produced by life in East Germany, confined to the oratory of its "cheerful killers" on the television monitor:

> Shivering under masks of knowledge,
> Freaked out by the extraordinary,
> Dreamless by day under cynical clocks,
> Timetables, scales, counseled by
> Cheerful killers, in front of the
> monitor—
> It made you sarcastic.

By the end of the poem, the self has had its sight immedicably corrupted: "The backs of your eyes peopled by monsters." ("Insects," not monsters, in the German.) The insects, as actual beings, seem more frightening than monsters (out of legend). The despair in the ironist's retrospect is felt in the shadow presence in the poem of the child he was, whose "sweet songs" antedated the sarcasm of the present.

The darkness of Durs Grünbein's vision has disturbed readers and reviewers. The poems, with their grim gaze, rarely offer relief from their short, knifing sentences. They challenge the reader to a contest in truth-telling: can you, reader, really deny this unsparing account? For readers who find a confirming darkness in themselves, in society, or in the powers that be, Grünbein appears as a voice in the wilderness, an astringent



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corrective to the mandatory blandness of those cheerful murderers talking at us from the television.

Grünbein's principled refusal of all transcendence did not falter after "Variations." In 1999, in *After the Satires*, his sight trains itself on society. In the original edition, Grünbein comments on the reference in his title to the satyr-plays following the tragedies: "After the satires: that meant once everything had been said and chewed over, the way home, the hang-over, the time for intellectual play and digestion." The scholar Judith Ryan remarks that "the poems attempt to register a bitter awakening on the part of East Germans after the first excitement of German reunification has worn off. Expecting to enjoy the economic prosperity or 'full plate' of the Federal Republic, former East Germans are disappointed to find that their lives are still difficult and that they are not always fully accepted by their new fellow citizens. Traces of the East German past remain engraved, as it were, on the faces and in the minds of those who experienced it."

The frequent criticism, by others, of Grünbein's bleakness is embedded in his "Memorandum":

> Poets, so they tell us, are awkward
> customers
> Not up to much. Even laughter has a
> keener, full-throated edge
> When they're not around. They're not
> very amusing.

No, poets are not very amusing. Even college students, confronting Emily Dickinson, ask, "Does she *always* have to be so *depressing*?" The peculiar exhilaration that attends every reading of a stunning poem is felt, perhaps, by only a minority: those reading solely for "content" are put off by "depressing" observations. The discontented demand by some readers that poetry should be "healing" or "uplifting" or "optimistic" or "humane" (or "accessible") re-affirms the truth of Eliot's observation that "human kind cannot bear very much reality." Perhaps poets of innately optimistic temperament are found more appealing than poets of the steely-eyed sort, just as poems of simple vocabulary tend to be preferred to poems of knotty intellectuality. Yet it is, in fact, an optimistic act to write any poem at all: the act implies the trust that another mind will meet the poem half way, and an even deeper trust that language can become adequate to a human predicament.

The "thirteen fantasies" that Grünbein clustered (in *After the Satires*) under the hellish title "Ashes for Breakfast" seem to abandon the faith in both the classics and the sciences that had been a bulwark in Grünbein's writing. Although the individual poems in "Ashes for Breakfast" are intricately formal and for the most part rhymed, their content is often brutal. Human beings, members of the animal kingdom, seem hardly distant from those ancestral primates whose busy louse-hunting has evolved into our ceaseless "*Unrast*," restlessness, "the ruin of our species." Behold man in Grünbein's pitiless portrait:

> Between snackbar and coitus, how
> often, miles from the Olduvai Gorge,
> The hairy geezer puts in an appearance,
> hobbling along on the backs of his
> hands,
> Failing abjectly as he reaches for the
> stars, because of a crooked ladder
> or a jammed elevator.
> (So much for *The Origin of Species* or
> *Civilization and Its Discontents*.)

The veneer of education, *ad astra per aspera*, seems miserably thin before such an apparition. There are even, for Grünbein, disheartening moments "when the books close ranks and it transpires they don't speak." Goings-on in the outer world are only a momentary distraction: after reading the newspaper, the poet announces that "I have breakfasted on ashes. My daily bread." Here the poet, speaking in the lyric first person, is the man of letters who looks for a sustaining word in the daily paper and finds none. The muse of history, Clio, will not reveal any significance in current events:

> I have breakfasted on ashes, the black
> Dust that comes off newspapers, from
> the freshly printed columns.
> When a coup makes no stain, and
> a tornado sticks to half a page.
> And it seemed to me as though the
> Fates licked their lips
>
> When war broke out in the sports
> section, reflected in the falling Dow.
> I have breakfasted on ashes. My daily
> bread.
> And Clio, as ever, keeps mum.... There,
> just as I folded them up,
> The rustling pages sent a shiver down
> my spine.

And yet Clio, for all her intermittent silence, is Grünbein's principal muse. He came to consciousness within the disastrous history of twentieth-century Germany and has had to re-imagine that history for himself, to meditate on the fire-bombed Dresden where he was born, and to judge the unified but invisibly divided Berlin where he now lives. Besides "Ashes for Breakfast," there are three other distinctive rhymed sequences in *After the Satires*: "Berlin Rounds," "Greetings from Oblivion City" (both about Berlin), and "Europe After the Last Rains" (about Dresden). It must give a shiver to citizens of Berlin to see their contemporary city-sites given sharp definition by Grünbein, with his perpetually simmering sense of an imperfectly buried past. The poem in "Berlin Rounds" about Friedrichshain (the area in which the poet has his study) ends with the half-forgotten evils of the Russian occupation: "That pleas went unheeded in the cellars / Is something you can sense, in Friedrichshain." But not everybody wants to sense such things. As the new Potsdamer Platz is being constructed, human scale vanishes, and the Russian-occupied past vanishes along with it:

> What's going on here, you ask, nothing
> looks familiar
> As you hunch under cranes. Didn't you
> use to be a giant
> And have the place at your feet?
> Squares shrank to Lilliputian scale
> When you surfaced. One "Atchoo!"
> brought down whole apartment
> blocks.
>
> This used to be waste ground, sand, and
> a bit of scorched grass,
> Not marked on the map. Now no one
> believes you when you say
> Goya's colossus used to sit here, waiting
> for it to revert to steppe.

Grünbein's sudden surges into another plane—from Potsdamer Platz to Goya's grossly over-sized man-eating monster—are richly typical of his agile imagination, which can swoop in a single line, with the celerity of incensed intelligence, from a banal present to an anguished past.

The tone taken about Berlin lightens somewhat in Grünbein's postcard sequence, "Greetings from Oblivion City." My favorite moment of lightness is the one in which the poet thinks up new constellations appropriate to industrialized postmodernity:

> Among the new
> Constellations, glittering alongside the
> Lyre, the Swan, and Sagittarius,
> Is a sports car at full tilt, hounded by a
> Dinosaur.
> Over the Revolver hangs the
> back-to-front Baseball Cap....
>
> Seen from the air, the city looks like a
> scrambled text anyway



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That only beings with polyhedron eyes
could ever crack.

And it was time (one thinks, reading Grünbein) that the modern fetish of working-out got its comeuppance:

A studio at night. A picture window.
Running on the spot,
Earplugs in, you see women strapped
to metal equipment
That resembles torture bench and
garrote. Fitness is the magic word
here.

But it is in the formidable 1994 eleven-poem Dresden sequence, "Europe after the Last Rains," that we see the most melancholy (and angry) Grünbein. He returns to the place of his youth, but it has disappeared. "Memory has no real estate … no city / where you come home and you know where you are." Remembering the World War II firebombing of the city, Grünbein asks, "Is it the same city in the valley / as the pilot saw in its phosphorescent glory?"

It was at one and the same time
long doomed, still inhabited, and
already forgotten
by the last of its fly-by-night tenants,
the
Furies flitting
from civilization to ashes.

In postwar Dresden, fragments of baroque architecture could still be seen along the Elbe; and Grünbein's analogizing mind juxtaposes those fragments with looming architectural shapes unearthed from the remote past:

Along the scuffed banks, worn brown
in parts,
you still encountered massy baroque.
Some souls might find
their personal Angkor Wat there in the
chilly moonlight.

The eleven poems of "Europe after the Last Rains" differ so greatly in length, rhyme scheme, and line length that they exert a formal fascination. Several poems play with various species of quatrain rhyme: there is a dizain here, a douzain there. And Poem IV is a sonnet, rhyming oddly, as it brackets the octave with its *a* rhyme, and the sestet with its *e* rhyme: *abcd bcda efg fge* (I separate the rhyme-units for convenience, but there are no spaces between the lines in the poem). Strange though it seems in its rhyme, this sonnet depends on one of the perennial sonnet conventions, the "running over" (from sheer emotion) of the octave into the ninth line. After the ninth line Dresden goes aflame, the water of its river useless to its burning inhabitants.

Only at the sixth poem of the eleven-poem "Europe" does one recognize the strict structure of the whole arc: 5 + 1 + 5. Poem VI, the central one, reveals the death of Grünbein's grandmother in the bombings of Dresden in February 1945 by the Royal Air Force and the American Army Air Force. The incendiary firestorm that engulfed the city killed thousands. I will quote the whole of this extraordinary poem of apocalypse, which includes the angels of the Last Trump. The poem as a whole, punctuated by three successive waves of bombers, is dedicated "To my grandmother, Dora W.":

When the first wave of bombers came,
she was
In hospital with scarlet fever. The air-
raid alarm
Tore many from their dreams. The
winter air grew warm,
And the night was bright as day.

Like ghosts in their white nightshirts,
They ran barefoot to the Elbe
meadows …
Panic, a surge of air from the bomb
bays,
Before the angels trumpeted from on
high.

And when the second wave of
bombers came,
The city vanished into a silent film, and
no shadow fell
As it burned through the wall of flame,
That was objective to some, and a trap
to others.

On one twentieth-century night, planes
Delivered a second stone age.
The odd bomb shelter, like the tomb
behind the stone,
Housed man, wife, and child, all done
to a crisp.

And when the third wave came, she was
walking
Calmly in the line of refugees, on
tottering legs
To the afterlife. There were no tears,
Nothing left to cry with in whatever
was left.

Even in translation, the poem is arresting (although "done to a crisp" seems to me a false note). But the original—with its elegiac subject, its harrowing images, its basis in family history, its dryness of statement, its solidity of technique—seems to me a work destined to last.

Grünbein is not unaware of what went on in Dresden before the bombing. In Poem VIII, recalling the destruction by bombs of masterpieces of painting and music, he acquiesces in that loss "in the name of what happened there," the death transports bringing innocent people to concentration camps. Then he asks the forbidden question: "Was it worth it?"

In the name of what
happened there
One gives up the Vermeer (burned)

And the Bach (disappeared).
Was it worth it? That whole cities,
From which the death transports rolled
Became wastelands on Lethe's banks.

Before the final subsidence of his Dresden sequence into blank erasure, Grünbein allows himself a surreal report of the city's chaos during the bombing, as circus animals flee into the fire, watched with dismay by the damaged statues of Apostles surveying the destruction from the roofs of churches. With understandable and unreasonable bitterness toward the young bombers, the poet remarks of the circus animals that none of them was a monster,

Compared to the smart boys, the pilots,

Who went after man and beast on
diving raids.
They did their stunts without a net
or trapeze
Above the arena. The charred
Apostles on the roofs stand there in
dismay.

The dismay of the charred Apostles as they gaze on the firestorm is a view from outside the world of bomber and bombed alike—a view unattainable, perhaps, to anyone but these appalled statues.

Germany's earlier twentieth century, led by a Führer and his followers, and populated by combatants, resisters, refugees, camp victims, children, "righteous Gentiles," and a host of subsidiary figures, has had its chronicles written and rewritten, just as the later twentieth century, with the Russian and American occupation, the Wall, the airlift, and the fall of East Germany, has had its own distinct forms of retrospection. One candid and chilling version of this history has been, and is being, told by Germany's poets. Durs Grünbein's account stands as an illumination and corrective to the more impersonal accounts of historians and scholars. ◆



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## Washington Diarist

# The Ballot Blues

I have never voted happily in a general election. In the 1980s I envied my conservative friends who drew the curtain of the voting booth over an epiphany, whereas I groaned beneath my philosophical complexity when I voted for Reagan; and when I voted for Clinton a decade later, it was not without an exertion of casuistry about the distinction between supportable and admirable. I have not yet been asked for my vote by a candidate who represents the entirety of my convictions. I am not dismayed by this. Politics should not provide the most complete or the most profound of life's satisfactions. Voting is not an expression of the soul. Anyway, my convictions do not add up. I like taxes and I like the military. (The only thing Obama said in any of those dreary debates that delighted me was his muffled admission the other night that "I don't mind paying a little more" taxes. Taxation is a strong sign of membership in a polity; and the many calamities of recent years have confirmed to me that the government needs my money, because there are emergencies, within and beyond our borders, with which only it can deal.) I want universal health care and I want an interventionist foreign policy. I believe that the American president should help people in distress, at home and abroad—not all of them, but a lot of them. I like capitalism, but not religiously, and I feel the same way about diplomacy. I do not trust bankers to understand American values and poets to understand American interests. Taken together, these are political inconsistencies, but they are not intellectual inconsistencies. It is not my problem that the political culture of this country has made the liberalism that I inherited, and of which I was honored to become an heir, seem incoherent. Or maybe it is my problem: after all, I have to vote.

For many years I began my mornings mordantly with Eugene McCarthy, as we walked our dogs along the uneventful streets of Kalorama. As we walked, we talked—or rather, I listened, because I did not wish to interrupt the rushing stream of his recollections and reflections. One day in the summer of 1992 our subject was the presidential campaign—"poor George," was how Gene began every remark about Bush—and he was warning me against allowing considerations of policy or philosophy too much to influence my view of the candidates. "You vote for the man," he drawled though his jowls. "What matters is the man." In his wicked accounts of his adventures in Washington, Gene was a master portraitist; he insisted that temperament is one of the causes of history. (He was an illustration of his rule.) When it comes to the president, he maintained, character is fate: his character, our fate. I have been thinking about Gene's advice in the last days—it is almost over!—of this campaign, but it does not quite settle the matter. Obama is too cool, but McCain is too hot. For all his articulateness, I still do not know what most moves Obama—what are the two or three grand proposals that he would put before the Congress and the country in the early months of his administration, which is all the respite from the madness of politics that any administration will ever get; and I cannot shirk the feeling, as I watch him rise, that I am witnessing not so much the triumph of a cause as the success of a plan. I must say that the Ayers affair rankles me, because I would not shake the man's dirty hand; and the fact that Obama was eight years old at the time of the Weather Underground is no more pertinent to his moral and historical awareness than the fact that he was six years old at the time of the King assassination. Obama's passionlessness spooks me. His friends tell me that my impression is wrong, but I long ago gave up on personal assurances about politicians. As far as I am concerned, politicians are what they want us to think they are. (And the lyricism of some of Obama's friends is embarrassing.) As for McCain: I admire his talent for allegiances, personal and historical; and also his talent for enmity, because we have enemies. He was splendidly right about the surge, which is not a small thing; and the grudging way Obama treats the reversal in Iraq, when he treats it at all, is disgraceful. Tyrants and *génocidaires* would sleep less soundly during a McCain presidency. And yet it is impossible any longer to ignore the contradiction between the nobility of his past and the ignobility of his present. He is abstracted, dispersed, out of focus, Stockdalesque, mentally undone. Often he sounds simply unintelligent. I would be more affected by his championing of soldiers and veterans if it were not also the championing of people like himself: solipsism is a common effect of solidarity, and McCain's sense of reality seems to be narrowing. The financial crisis harshly exposed these limitations: it made McCain more dogmatic and more doctrinaire, with his wild refrain about tax cuts and his unmaverick-like refusal to examine his party's cult of corporations. His economics refuted his compassion. McCain feels with his heart, but he thinks with his base. And when he picked Sarah Palin, he told the United States of America to go fuck itself. I used to think of my dilemma this way: Obama's conception of America is better than he is, McCain's conception of America is worse than he is. But McCain is looking more and more like his America, which is Bush's America: a country of capitalists and Christians. I do not know how to explain what has become of him. But the more I regard him, the more I recall Gene's ominous words. You vote for the man.

Obama is a smart man. He is a decent man. He is an undangerous man, in the manner of all pragmatists and opportunists. He reveres reason, though he often confuses it with conversation. His domestic goals are good, though the titans of American finance, the greedy geniuses of Wall Street, may have made many of those goals fantastic. He will see to it that some liberalism survives at the Supreme Court. This leaves only the rest of the world. What a time for a novice! I dread the prospect of Obama's West Wing education in foreign policy: even when he spoke well about these matters in the debates, it all sounded so new to him, so light. He must not mistake the global adulation of his person with the end of anti-Americanism. And he must not mistake his hope for the world with his analysis of the world. But OK, then: Obama, and another anxious visit to the ballot box, with—in the stinging words of Du Bois—"a hope not hopeless but unhopeful."

*Leon Wieseltier*



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